

THE  
HIGHWAY  
OF  
HOLINESS.

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W. HAY AITKEN









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HIGHWAY OF HOLINESS.

Helps to the Spiritual Life.

BY  
*William*  
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"THE SCHOOL OF GRACE"; "THE GLORY OF THE GOSPEL";  
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## PREFACE.

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THIS second volume of the series of Sermons bearing the general designation of *The Mission Pulpit* differs from its predecessor in that none of the discourses which it contains are of an evangelizing character. They are addressed to those who have already received the gospel in the obedience of faith, and are designed to lead such onward in the spiritual life. It may perhaps be suggested that sermons of this class are not Mission Sermons, and therefore are out of place in such a series as *The Mission Pulpit*: but we answer that missions have a double object; they are designed to reach the careless and the worldly, but they are also intended to benefit those in whom the new life has begun by leading them on to a fuller consecration of themselves to God, and a more practical apprehension of their spiritual rights and privileges. This secondary object is usually present to the mission preacher's mind in his morning services, when he has reason to believe that his congregation is, to a very great extent, composed of the more earnest and spiritually-minded members of the flock. Hence no true idea of a mission and of mission teaching can be given in such a series unless sermons of both classes are published. I have thought it well, however, not to mingle sermons of these two classes indiscriminately, but rather to aim at a definite object in each volume, by selecting and

putting together in each severally those addresses which are adapted specially for one or other of the two classes with which in mission work we have to do. The advantages of adopting this course are obvious—the reader is by this arrangement enabled to select the volume most likely to be suitable to his own case, or most likely to be of service to others in whom he is interested, and it is also possible for the author to observe something like order and method in his arrangement of the contents of each book.

It will be observed that the sermons of this volume, although preached at different times and places, have been arranged so as to exhibit a certain sequence of ideas. Thus the first deals with the general subject of holiness as the special end and aim, subjectively speaking, of our probation; the second indicates the only source of true holiness—Christ in us the hope of glory; the third presents us with the criterion of holiness—the character of God exhibited for our imitation in the human form and in the life of Christ; while the fourth sketches that process of growth and development in holiness which should characterize Christian experience. Passing, then, to the region of experience, we consider, first, the true attitude of the believer starting on his career, as illustrated by the triumphant anticipations of the Israelite on crossing the Red Sea; and next, in sad and humiliating contrast, the line of conduct too often pursued still by those who come out of the spiritual Egypt, as by their Israelitish prototypes of old; and then we go on to consider that new start which Israel made on the death of Moses, as illustrating the passage of humbled and penitent souls to a higher level of Christian experience and to the triumph of the life of faith. The next two sermons are companions, and so are those that immediately follow them. The first two deal with the subject of following Christ, as illustrated in the history

of Simon Peter ; and here are shown, first, the hindrances to a life of close fellowship with the Master, and then the conditions under which we may rise to such an experience. In the next two sermons we consider the spiritual life in its active and contemplative phases, as illustrated respectively by what is recorded of the two sisters, Martha and Mary. Then follow in the next three discourses words of warning against certain common forms of danger to which the spiritual life is exposed ; and then the volume closes with a sermon on the Christian life, considered as a perennial feast of good things, in which special reference is made to that Holy Banquet of Love in which this aspect of our experience is so eloquently set forth, and another on the Christian armour, which in this volume, as in the epistle to the Ephesians, is our "*Finally*."

Hoping that the consecutive character of the teaching it contains may add to the interest of this little volume, I have ventured thus to call the reader's attention to it. I now commit the book into his hands, hoping and praying that it may contribute, in some small way at any rate, to the perfecting of the saints and the edifying of the body of Christ.

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## The Highway of Holiness.

“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness ; the unclean shall not pass over it ; but it shall be for those” (or ‘He shall be with them,’ if you look in your margins) : “the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there ; but the redeemed shall walk there : and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—*Isaiah xxxv. 8-10.*

WE can hardly make a greater mistake in our theology than to suppose that the gospel dispensation has been designed by God in order to bring down the standard of the divine claims to the level of human infirmity. So far from this being the case the gospel dispensation has been inaugurated and designed specially in order that human infirmity may be raised to the level of the divine claims. However great this error may be, I am afraid it is a common one. As we contemplate the claims of God on the heart of man, extending as they do to the region of motive as well as that of conduct—embracing in fact the whole substance of our lives, we are ready to ask, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Impressed with this feeling, it is perhaps not surprising if we should feel disposed to regard the gospel as a kind of revelation of indulgence on the part of God. We are apt to conceive of Him as though He intended to say to us through the gospel, “I have found that you cannot rise to the claims I have already made upon you, therefore I will reduce my claims and be satisfied with something less than what I originally designed. Henceforth under the gospel the demands of the law are no longer to be rigidly enforced ; nor the threatened penalty, in case of failure and disobedience, to be incurred.” It is easy to see that if this were the true character of the gospel dispensation, we should have little occasion to glory in the cross, nor could such a gospel fail to exert a deteriorating influence on mankind.

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Evangelical truth would very soon prove what it is even now by some slanderously affirmed to be, demoralizing, and Christ Himself become a minister of sin to us ! Let us rather believe that through the gospel new sources of spiritual power are opened up to us—new objects set before us, aye, and brought within reach of our hearts' contemplation and comprehension. And this being so, God is in a position to expect of us greater things than could be realized under the law. And those who surrender themselves fully to Christ in the gospel dispensation stand upon a vantage ground such as did not belong to those who lived in the earlier periods of the world's history.

In this passage the prophet was looking forward, as it would seem, to the glories of the Christian dispensation, and this was the characteristic of this new era that he contemplated with the most complete satisfaction, "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness." But it may occur to some of us to ask, "Had there been no knowledge of the 'way of holiness' under previous dispensations? Does holiness of life belong only to the gospel age?" I reply, Undoubtedly there were holy and humble men of heart before the Incarnation—men who lived in advance of their age. These were the bold pioneers of spiritual progress, who made their way through the pathless forest and the trackless wastes ere the King's great highway was opened for our feet. It was with them as with the pioneers of civilization in our own days. Hardy travellers have made their way right across the continent of Central Africa, exploring in almost all directions the vast and unknown region ; but there is no highway across the continent of Africa : and those, therefore, who have crossed it, or attempted to do so, have had to face great and untold difficulties, and endure a vast amount of hardship and privation. By-and-by, if the world lasts long enough, and civilization progresses, there may be a grand trunk road right across that continent, and by-and-by perhaps railways may be laid, and easy communication established, with that remote and barbarous region.

My friends, it is even so, as it seems to me, with regard to the highway of holiness. Before the Christian dispensation earnest and devoted men attained to various degrees of holiness, but the King's highway to holiness was not yet open. It was not yet revealed to the world what true and

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perfect holiness was, nor how we are to rise to it. *Righteousness* rather than holiness was set forth in the law. It needed the Incarnation of the Son of God to reveal it to man. And not until the Word of the Father was clothed in human form, and lived among His fellow-men in fashion as a man, did human eyes contemplate the true ideal of holiness, the standard and type of absolute perfection. In the life and conduct of Christ that standard was embodied and revealed; by the death and resurrection of Christ the spiritual power was secured to us by which it becomes possible for us to rise to the level of conduct so indicated. The highway of holiness was thus opened; and, my dear brethren, it now becomes possible for "the wayfaring men, though fools," to walk therein.

There are two thoughts then specially suggested to our minds in this connexion. The first is, that in order to open the highway of holiness it was necessary that a perfect example should be given to mankind, so that men could understand what perfect holiness means; and that has been presented to us in the human life of Jesus. And this is no small matter, my dear brethren; for till some such revelation had been made we might have groped after holiness in vain; nay, we might have mistaken something else for it, a mistake by no means uncommon amongst the fanatical devotees of the East.

But there is another thought. Not only does Christ stand before us as a perfect example, but He also imparts to us the secret of all true spiritual power by bringing us, the wandering children of men, into close and blessed connection with God. The same power which rendered it possible for Jesus Christ as a man to be perfectly holy is thus brought within our reach by the Incarnation, and death and resurrection, of Jesus Christ. All obstacles, all barriers and impediments, between us and our God have been by Him removed; and hence it is possible for us to find in God all those resources of spiritual power by which we may be able to run and not grow weary, and to walk and not faint. Thus, we may say, not only have we the map and the chart of the highway of holiness placed in our hands, but also the highway itself opened up to us by the communication of a spiritual ability to tread therein.

But if those advantages are real, they carry with them enhanced responsibilities. Where more is given more must needs be required. So long as we were ignorant of the power of steam, we thought it a very great thing if we could journey

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from one end of the country to another in our stage-coaches at a rate of ten miles an hour. But as soon as the discoveries of Stephenson placed steam at our disposal for locomotive purposes, we ceased to be satisfied with that rate of speed, and now unless our trains cover a distance of thirty or forty or even fifty miles an hour we are by no means satisfied with them. Indeed our patience would be sorely tried by that which we should have commended before as an excellent rate of speed. Even so while the dispensation of the law existed, and there was no other revelation, a lower standard of holiness of life was all that could be looked for. The deep spiritual import, and the wide scope of the law, was not apprehended by those who were under the law, and in the lives of ancient worthies we see in how many respects as to their very ideas of holiness they seem to come short of the gospel standard.

But when Jesus Christ entered the world, and exhibited to us what true moral beauty is, and what godliness and spiritual holiness really are—when He reflected upon the creature all the glories of the Creator in His own blessed Person—the case was changed. Further, when by His great work He bound heaven and earth together, constituting Himself the Jacob's ladder upon which the angels of God ascend and descend, taking up the story of our needs and bringing down the riches of God's supply, He took away our last excuse for a life of failure and inconsistency, and we cannot plead either ignorance or inability. The standard of holiness is there, and the power; and the fault is ours, if we do not imitate the one and avail ourselves of the other.

Having thus realised our responsibility, then let us proceed to consider some of the characteristics of the life of holiness to which the prophet here calls our attention, and the conditions which are attached to the *right of way*. The first thing stated about it is this, "The unclean shall not pass over it;" and I wish for a moment to lay stress upon this consideration, that until we are washed and cleansed from our "old sins" we are not in a position to pass over the King's highway of holiness.

A large number of persons start wrong here. As soon as they come under religious influences, they become conscious of devout aspiration and earnest longings after holiness, and so they set to work to try and make themselves holy. They lay down rules for their conduct, and endeavour to shape their lives as Christians should. They become very methodical and

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regular in their religious habits, and sometimes very zealous in their religious work, and thus they hope that they will gradually grow into a condition of holiness. But all the time the unforgiven past stands between them and holiness, and till that past is blotted out, and its record obliterated from the archives of eternity, they must needs be precluded from attaining the holiness that their hearts are set upon. Oh, my dear friends, are there any of you who, desiring to be holy, have not begun by seeking purification? Let me press upon your minds that cleansing must come first, holiness afterwards. First, the heart needs to be delivered from its unfriendly burthen of sins; and this once having been done, it is then possible for us to go on to walk in holiness and righteousness before God all the days of our life; but purification first.

Hence it is that some people who desire to lead holy lives are no better than legalists. They cannot love much, because they have not had much forgiven them; thus they lose the true motive of a Christian life, while they are crippled in their efforts to attain to the proper standard of holiness, both by the weight of unforgiven sin and by absence of that spiritual power which flows to us through reconciliation. We must pass through the gate before we can pass along the way, and that gate is the cross, where the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses *from* all sin.

Nor is it difficult to find a reason for this necessity. Indeed, this passage gives us a sufficient reason if we are to accept the marginal rendering—"For He shall be with them." It is quite true that Jesus Christ was the Friend of publicans and sinners; but He was their Friend because He saved them from their sins. It would have been an unseemly thing if Jesus Christ had lived in companionship with them while they pursued their sinful courses. If He had chosen a band of brigands as His disciples, and carried them about with Him wherever He went through Galilee and Judæa, his reputation would deservedly have suffered. The sinners that He drew towards Himself were men who wished to have done with their sins, and who came to Him for deliverance from their sins. And it is so now; those only who hate their sins, and who come to Christ to be delivered from their sins, can walk along the highway of holiness, because He is sojourning with those who sojourn there, and He cannot walk with the unclean.

But having called attention to this statement as a reason for



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the necessity of cleansing, let us now dwell upon it for a few moments as a characteristic of the way of holiness, and of the experience of those who pass along it. The highway of holiness is the path of *fellowship with the divine*. When Christ was here on earth He ever moved along this way, and He is still to be found there by those who pass along it. Indeed, so closely is His presence and our fellowship with Him connected with true spiritual holiness, that we can scarcely say whether the holiness is the fruit of the fellowship, or the fellowship the effect of the holiness. We may put it thus: Fellowship with Christ is the privilege of those who are wholly consecrated to the Lord, whose supreme desire is to be holy as He is holy; and just in so far as this privilege is actually realized, the soul is more and more completely sanctified by contact with the divine. Thus, to consecrate ourselves to Him, turning our backs on all that is opposed to His will, is to be in such a position as to be able to enjoy fellowship with Him, and to enjoy fellowship with Him is to become assimilated to Him; and thus it is that sanctification becomes actual and positive, instead of being mainly negative in its nature, and expressing itself chiefly in the region of the desires or intentions.

Hence, if we would make progress in holiness, we cannot speak too strongly of the importance of asserting our privilege in this respect, and endeavouring to maintain unbroken fellowship with God in Christ, for only thus can we advance. To lose fellowship is to stand still, and make no progress in the way; nay, even to lose ground or backslide. To walk with God is to gain ground steadily, while we behold His glory, and are changed into the same image as by the Spirit of God. On the other hand, it is not less true that if a man is careless about holiness, and if his whole heart's desire is not bent upon attaining to it, he must soon forfeit the privilege of fellowship. It is only while we walk in the light, as He is in the light, that we have fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. These two elements in our experience act and react upon each other. The warmer and closer our fellowship, the deeper our love of holiness; and the more careful we are in our pursuit of holiness, the more shall we enjoy the blessedness of Christ's fellowship.

Now are there any amongst us who know little of this life of fellowship with God? Have we to confess that we do not take Him about with us wherever we go, nor feel His presence

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sanctifying all we do? Alas! that so many of us Christians should have to make such confessions. May not the reason be, dear Christian brother, that you are not walking along the way of holiness? You have reason to believe that you have been saved from condemnation and death by faith in Christ; but, alas! you are satisfied with this, instead of pressing towards the mark for the prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus. Ah, my friend, you are out of harmony with the mind of Jesus; for His will is your sanctification, and your will is only your salvation, and can two walk together except they be agreed? "Are your minds set upon right, O ye congregation?" David enquires of his contemporaries, and we need to press the same question on our fellow-Christians. Many of us have our minds set upon escaping hell, and getting, somehow or other, safe into heaven; but this is not the highway of holiness, and Jesus is not there. "Follow holiness," exclaims St. Paul, "without which no man shall see God." Ah, how many lose the vision of God, in this life at any rate, because they do not take this advice; and if we lose that vision now, what right have we to hope for it hereafter?

Dear brethren, let us not by negligence and carelessness, or by being contented with a low and unworthy level of conduct and experience, forfeit this which is the crowning blessedness of life, "He shall be with them." Surely every step is lost which is not taken in the society of Jesus, and only brings us farther and farther from our journey's proper end.

This characteristic of this highway of holiness on which we have just been dwelling prepares us for the next. What wonder if we walk in fellowship with Christ that we should never lack the needed guidance and direction, and so the Seer goes on to say, "Wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." This highway is, *first, the way of the purified*; and, *next, the way of fellowship with God*; and *in the third place, it is the way of right direction*. Here is a promise that may well comfort us in the perplexities of life. How often in life it seems as if we scarcely know which way to turn; we want to do the right thing, but we hardly know which is the right thing to do. The questions of what I must call religious casuistry from time to time suggested to us are sometimes most bewildering. But here is the promise if we are on the King's highway of holiness, "Though we are fools we shall not err." The reason why we make such great mistakes as we

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sometimes do is surely that we get off the King's highway of holiness. We allow ourselves to aim at some other object, and to be guided by some lower desire. We begin to pursue our own pleasure, or to gratify our ambition, or perhaps we seek to please other people, and to avoid the cross. So we come down from the highway to seek a smoother path in some by-way, and soon we miss our course and wander wearily, as in a labyrinth of error, from which afterwards it may be difficult to extricate ourselves. Oh for a "single eye!" "If thine eye be single thine whole body shall be full of light."

But when the wayfaring man is on the highway of holiness this promise will be fulfilled. He may seem to make mistakes, but the apparent mistake will not be a real error. God will overrule what appears to be a blunder to His own glory. Indeed, I believe that we may have to thank God for life's perplexities, just because they teach us to feel so conscious of our dependence on our Guide, and to commit ourselves fearlessly and continuously to Him who will lead us by the right way, though it may seem a strange way, for "His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known, yet He leads His people like a flock."

There is yet another thought suggested by this clause which may serve to explain some of our errors, for real Christians unquestionably do sometimes err. The prophet here speaks of those who are fools as being assured of right doctrines. May not one cause of mistakes sometimes be that we are not content to take the place of fools. We feel too much confidence in our own sound judgment and common-sense, and so we scarcely regard it as necessary to enquire of the Lord. I do not mean to say that we ought not to use our natural faculties. They are a trust from God, and we are bound to use them. But we are warned not to lean on our own understanding, and he who gives us this advice would have been a much happier man and made much fewer practical mistakes if he had only taken it himself. Most humbling it is, surely, to think of a man possessed of such intellectual gifts as belonged to Solomon making such grave and such foolish errors as he was guilty of, and we may be sure that we shall fare no better. What is the proper attitude of the child of God who feels his own ignorance and folly? David shall express it for us; for David practised what his more gifted son only preached: "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto



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the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God." That is the attitude of the wayfaring fools on the highway of holiness, and such are more infallible than ever Roman Pontiff claimed to be.

But there is yet another reason why we sometimes err, suggested to us by this clause. And this other reason brings before our minds the fourth characteristic of the way of holiness. It is "the way of right direction," but it is only the way of right direction to those who are *wayfaring men*. "The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." Do we not sometimes err because we have so little of the wayfaring man about us? Living as we do in a luxurious age, how many of us surround ourselves with luxury, and lay ourselves out for self-indulgence! Carefully do we feather our nests, and deeply do we strike our roots into the earth, as if this were indeed our continuing city, and the Jerusalem above only a sentimental dream. Like Moab, we are settled on our lees, and shrink from the painful process of being emptied from vessel to vessel, and our dull ears scarce hear the voice that ever sounds through a world that God hath cursed, "Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest; because it is polluted it shall destroy you with a sore destruction." And while we thus take our ease and allow ourselves to act as if all around were permanent, the spirit of the world soon begins to enthrall us, and the vision of the New Jerusalem fades from the dimming eye of our hope, and we become citizens of this country, like those "enemies of the cross of Christ" of whom St. Paul says, "They mind earthly things." Ah, my dear friends, if we decline to recognize our own privileges as citizens of heaven, if we do not obey the call, "Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the earth," can we wonder that we err? Indeed, how can we do otherwise? We have lost sight of our proper landmark.

Remember, I beseech you, my dear brethren, that the purest affections of earth and its most innocent pleasures may come to be barriers across the road to heaven. We are called to use the world as not abusing it; surely it is the abuse of the world when we allow it to take the place of heaven. When our hopes are of earth, and the plan and purpose of our life of earth, and our joys and pleasures of earth, and our trials and sorrows of earth, and our love, and perhaps our en-

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mities, of earth; when our treasure is for the most part on earth, and our employment on earth, our home an earthly home, our life an earthly life, oh, do you wonder that we make poor progress on the highway of holiness! Are we pilgrims and strangers, dear friends? or are we settled residents? Do we feel at home on earth? or are our dwellings, tents as it were, pitched by the wayside, while we hasten on to the city that hath foundations? Are we greatly concerned about our comforts and luxuries, or do we treat those with indifference while we press forward? Are we eager to avoid the unpleasant, and to court the pleasurable as if this were our paradise, or are we comparatively careless about these if only we may please the Master?

It is a very easy thing for us to get up at our meetings and sing sentimental hymns about being "pilgrims and sojourners" travelling to our home; but what next? Do we then go down to our offices and make as much money as ever we can, so that we may better our position, or be able to surround ourselves with as many carnal gratifications as our purse will bring within our reach without committing actual sin? Do we dole out our money with an unholy prudence to charitable objects, while we spend the superfluity of our means upon ourselves and our creature comforts? You are too heavy-laden, my brother; you can't push on along the King's highway. You carry too much luggage for a pilgrim; and it not only weighs you down, but it causes you an immense amount of care and anxiety. You can't take all that *with you* to heaven; hadn't you better send some of it on in advance, as the Master has told you to do? "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

There is a quaint old Latin proverb which tells us, "The penniless travellers shall sing before the robbers." No wonder; for what can the robbers take from them? And many a Christian might sing defiance of all enemies—even of the great robber himself, if only we made over our all to its proper Owner, and regarded it as a sacred trust to be used for Him. But no. How many of us content ourselves with offering a slender portion of our all to God? The rest we have to drag along with us in mortal fear of the robbers, who are always on the look-out for affluent travellers who turn aside a little from the King's highway. And many of us are grievously robbed; for we find we have put our money into bags full of holes, or by some strange transmutation process of a moral character our silver is become

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dross—base coin, that will not purchase the satisfaction and the joy that once was ours at a gift, when, with a light heart and only a pilgrim's wallet, we pressed onward and upward along the highway of holiness. Oh, rise, ye children of the resurrection, rise above the sordid world; rise from a self-indulgent life! Gird up your loins as those who are on a journey; take your staff in your hand and press forward; and then it will be said of you one day as it was said of those ancient pilgrim fathers, "They went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and *into the land of Canaan they came.*"

Now for another feature of this highway of holiness. It is not only the way of right direction to the wayfaring man, but is also "the way of safety." "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon. It shall not be found there." If we are therefore *bonâ fide* pilgrims—not merely pilgrims in name—and journeying to the land of which the Lord has said, "I will give it to you," we are assured that the highway of holiness shall be a way of safety to us. "No lion shall be there." What! Is Satan then really to lose his power to do us harm? We tremble at the thought of what his power is, and at the ruthless deeds he has done among human kind; and when we hear of the principalities and powers of darkness that are arrayed against us our hearts are ready to sink. But cheer up; here is good news for us; for "no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall come up thereon." He may come to the hedge which fences in the highway from the rest of the world; he may growl and roar, and do his best to terrify you, but so long as your eye is single, and you are moving on the King's great highway of holiness, the lion cannot lay a paw upon you or inflict a single wound. "No lion shall be there."

Can we get a little comfort in thinking about our relations with our great foe? "Out of the strong came forth meat, and out of the eater came forth sweetness." You remember Samson's riddle; let us give it a novel application. Simon Peter says, "Your adversary the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." That sounds very terrible: going about as a roaring lion. If one of those lions in your Zoological Gardens were to break loose, and news were brought to this congregation that there was a roaring lion going about in our streets seeking whom he might devour, we should not be very eager to leave the safe precincts of this church. But if we were assured that

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the savage beast was so strangely constituted that there were only half a dozen persons in this town that he could devour, and if we had good reason to know that we were not one of those, then our confidence would soon be restored. Now let us consider what is implied in these alarming words. First, we are told he "goeth about." That is something very startling. He and his emissaries are everywhere, always present, ready to do their fatal work. And further, he "goeth about like a roaring lion." More terrible still, giving us some idea of his appalling strength and malignant hostility. Is there any comfort to be derived from all this? Look at it again. He is described as "*going about* like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Surely he need not go far. Why seek when there are plenty of those whom he desires to destroy apparently within his reach? Why should he not seize hold of the first Christian he meets and make a meal of him? Nay, but he cannot do so; he must "seek whom he may devour." It is not every Christian that he meets that he can "devour." No; he must go about and seek "whom he may devour."

There are some people he cannot devour. Here is encouragement for the children of God. The power of the enemy is limited. He can only go so far, and no further. The lion's roar means terror to those out of the highway of holiness, but it means assurance and security to you who are in it. When does the lion roar? The Psalmist tells us that the lions roar and suffer hunger. The roar is the sign of their hunger; they are silent when they have just been well fed. So the thought suggested to our mind is that Satan is presented to us in the form of a roaring lion, because he is hungry. He cannot get what he wants, cannot satisfy the appetite of his malignity as he desires. There are many people whom he seeks to get hold of but cannot. And why? Because of the Divine Presence between them and him. The angel of the Lord, who closed the mouths of the lions in Daniel's den, has still plenty of similar occupation. And we needn't fear "the lions' den, or the mountains of the leopards," so long as the high way of holiness lies there.

Fear not, the lions are chained. Admit no timorous, unbelieving thoughts. "Who is he that can harm you, if ye be followers of the good One?" Only keep to the highway of holiness, and you are safe, and the attacks of your foe shall only deepen your sense of security. And if you ask for an

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explanation of this mysterious safety, I point you to the words which follow. It is the way of the redeemed. "The redeemed shall walk there." Why has Satan no power to do us harm? Because we have been redeemed out of his power. Jesus Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity. And now that He has redeemed us, we are in a position to claim exemption and immunity, not from Satan's attacks, but from his tyrannous power over us. He may make his attacks, and he may say as Pharaoh said, "I will pursue;" but when, like Pharaoh, he goes on to say, "I will overtake," God says him nay, and puts a pillar of fire between Pharaoh and the host of Israel, so that the one comes not near the other. And why? Because by the shedding of the blood of sprinkling they had been redeemed, first from His own judgment against their sin, and then, as a consequence, they were redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and from the house of bondage. Oh, children of the Resurrection, claim the full benefits of redemption, lay hold of that which is your blessed prerogative! Dare to defy the enemy in God's name, who hath redeemed you by His own offered life, redeemed you from the power of the enemy, redeemed you from the body of death, redeemed you from the beggarly elements of this passing world. Believe in your redemption, and you shall find it a blessed and stupendous reality, not a barren legal fiction.

Thus we are carried on to the next characteristic of the highway of holiness. It is "a way of joy." This surely is not to be wondered at; for if we are saved from the lion because we have been redeemed—if we are living in the fellowship of Christ, if, as wayfaring men, we are assured of the right direction—no wonder that we should be happy. Do you think it is strange that the ransomed of the Lord should return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads? Why should they not rejoice? Well does one of our familiar hymns put it:

"With steady pace the pilgrim moves  
Towards that blissful shore,  
And sings with cheerful heart and voice,  
"Tis better on before."

But there is no real happiness out of the highway of holiness. Who are the happy Christians? They who follow the Lord fully. Who are the miserable Christians? Those who aim at



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compromise, who lead a half-hearted life ; for the lion can tear and wound them, if not utterly destroy them, as they stray from time to time from the highway of holiness ; nor can they enjoy fellowship, for they do not walk in the light ; nor can they be sure of right direction, for "he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." But the happy travellers along the King's highway are so joyous that they are obliged to sing ; they cannot keep their happiness to themselves ; nay, their joy beams from their faces. The ancient masters used to paint a halo round the heads of the saints, and very unnatural some of these halos look. But there is a real halo around the head of every child of God who walks in the highway of holiness. You have only to look into those faces to see how bright their inner life is. The everlasting joy is upon their heads, bathing them in a holy radiance of calm delight ; and the more they sing of their God, the more the skin of their countenance shines. They move on in that quiet consciousness of His presence, and still as they sing they go steadily forward—marching and singing, singing and marching, until the hymns of earth are lost in the triumph song of heaven.

Oh, learn to sing, ye children of the Resurrection ! Let the joy of the Lord be your strength. God wants you to be happy, and you shall be happy if only you give yourself over to Him. Do not be afraid to step out into the darkness along the highway of holiness. He will turn the darkness into light, and make the rough places plain, only go on. When the Israelites went up to Jerusalem they used to sing their songs of degrees along the way ; for every stage there was a particular song appointed. They raised the familiar strain at each stage of the journey, and as they sang it brought before their minds the thought that they were so much nearer to Jerusalem, and to the temple of the Lord. Even so, as we journey toward our heavenly Jerusalem, let us sing our hymns of degrees, and as we sing feel ourselves by one degree, and yet another degree, to be drawing nearer, and still nearer, to the blissful place to which we are bound. And if we pass through a sterile "valley of Baca" our songs turn it into a well, and the pools shall be full of the water of life, that flows from the throne of God, and brings along with it wherever it goes fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

And thus we arrive at the last characteristic of the King's

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highway of holiness. To recapitulate for a moment, we have seen that it is first, *the way of the purified*; second, it is *the way of fellowship*; third, it is *the way of right direction*; fourth, it is *the way of wayfaring men*; fifth, it is *the way of safety*, because it is trodden by the redeemed; sixth, it is *the way of joy*; and now, seventh, it is *the way that leads Home*.

Yes, it leads to our true home. We love the word home, do we not? And some of us who are a good deal away from home perhaps love it better than other people do. What a joy there is in going home—even though we know our earthly home is only a pilgrim's tent by the wayside, and that we shall have to leave it again very soon. Yet we love it, because it is the nearest approach to our true home that we can have here. But after all this is only the semblance and the type, the reality is yonder. If it be joy to revisit our earthly home, though its pleasures are so uncertain and short-lived, what will it be to be there! And as we press onwards and upwards along the way of holiness, and rise above the mist and clouds that dim our sight, our vision stretches as from some mountain height towards the distant view, and we seem to catch a faint glimpse of the queenly city—the New Jerusalem. Yes, we are going home! we are going home! we are going home! We are on the King's highway, and every step brings us a little nearer to that home where our own Father lives, and where we shall receive such a welcome as only a father can give; where our brothers and sisters, who have gone before—brothers and sisters dear to us as life itself, and not lost because they have gone before—shall reach out to us the hand of welcome; and familiar voices shall greet our ears, teaching us that heaven is not a strange place. Then, as we gaze on the pure and holy and godlike, we shall feel the rush of joy as the reign of love begins, and our hearts shall beat with rapture at the thought—safe home at last, safe home at last!

Oh, blessed are they who know they are going home! Oh, blessed they who delight in the thought that home is nigh, whom each day's journey leaves a little higher above the plain of earth, a little higher upon the mountain of God, and happy they who cheer themselves amidst life's trials and difficulties with the blessedness of such anticipations. They tell us that the ancient crusaders, as they marched towards Palestine, encountering untold hardships and innumerable difficulties and trials, used to cheer each other with a familiar war cry. You might hear it ringing

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from rank to rank as the mighty host moved forward. Sometimes it would be in the morning, when they had just struck their tents and had begun to move forward when the sun was rising with all its glory in the east, and day was just breaking upon them—another day of hardship and toil. Then from the vanguard of those serried ranks you would hear the shout arise, “Dahin!”—“thither.” And as they raised the cry the ranks behind them, rank after rank, would take it up, until the country resounded with the cry—“thither;” and with the word their spirits would rise superior to all the hardships of the way. “We are bound for the Holy Land to plant the cross and overthrow the crescent, and each day’s march brings us nearer. Cheer up, brave hearts and true, we’ll reach it by-and-by!” And sometimes it would be at eventide, when the sun was setting and the darkness coming on. As daylight disappeared, once more the thrilling cry would rise up from ten thousand voices, “Dahin! thither! We are a day’s march nearer; we won’t give up—we will die first!” Even so with us; as we journey on amidst discouragement and difficulty, should not we do well from time to time to fix our eyes upon our Home?—

“There is my portion fair :  
My treasure and my heart are there,  
And my abiding home.”

Oh, cheer yourselves with the prospect, as you think of those bright spirits that have gone before, and of the welcome that awaits you there! Surely if we could hear their voices they would tell us that the highway of holiness is the way to heaven, and that however steep and arduous, the end is worth the effort. Heaven is worth gaining; God is worth knowing; Christ is worth possessing. Oh, blessed will be our journey’s end, when “God is all in all!” Are you going home? Are there any in this congregation now going away from their home? Are there any going the way that leads from the Father’s house into the outer darkness? Oh, listen to the voice of Him who is *the Way*! Let Him wash you from your sins in His own blood; then may you press forward with joy along the Heavenly way, until one day it shall be recorded of you also, “They went forth to go unto the land of Canaan, and unto the land of Canaan they came.”



## “To me to live is Christ.”

“To me to live is Christ.”—PHIL. i. 21.

WE were contemplating in our last discourse the King's highway of holiness. We took occasion to observe that the opening up of this highway was the distinguishing glory of the gospel period. We further proceeded to point out several of the features and prominent characteristics of this King's highway, as indicated in that notable passage from which we took our text, Isaiah xxxv. It may have occurred to some of you to ask, “Well, but what is this highway of holiness? We have heard sundry of its features and characteristics described; but what is it? and how may I walk upon it? What specific form does it assume in the experiences of those who are favoured to live in the gospel dispensation?”

Assuming that this question may have suggested itself to your mind, I will call your attention to a sentence of St. Paul's, descriptive of his own experience, which would seem to afford an answer: “To me to live is Christ.” Jesus Christ when He was here on earth said of Himself, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.” Not only is He the door unto the way, but He is Himself the Way. Not only does He provide in Himself a perfect type or example of holiness, thus rendering it possible for us to aspire to a like holiness, but He is Himself the power by which we rise to the possession of holiness, and exhibit the beauties of holiness in our lives.

Jesus Christ, formed within us by the operation of God the Holy Ghost, is holiness. You cannot distinguish between the holiness which is divinely infused and the Divine Person whose presence within our nature infuses it. The Christ formed within us is the form of holiness, and the holiness formed within us is the moral form of Christ.

In considering this subject we are struck in the first place with the contrast between this fervid utterance of St. Paul, regarded

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as descriptive of his own experience, and much that goes by the name of religion in our own day. "To me to live is Christ." How many are there amongst us who consider themselves religious who have never even thought of measuring their religion by such a standard as that! Their religion is a kind of appendage that they attach to the rest of their lives. There are other things they live for and are occupied about; but there is a certain residuum of their life that they give over to religious duties. When you have nothing better to do, then take to religion.

It was very much the same with the ancient idolater, so eloquently described by the Prophet. This pious man would go into the forest and hew down his tree, and proceed to turn its timber to various purposes. Some of it might do for articles of furniture or husbandry, and most of it would be useful for firewood; but there is still a little left, and "the residue thereof he maketh a god." It is an excellent use for an awkward remnant that will serve no other purpose.

Even so, how many nominal Christians there are who spend their lives upon a variety of different objects, while to ease their consciences they reserve a certain residue of their existence for the duties of religion—the heartless and formal service of an idol god. Yes; it is not "the only true God" that such worship; for He declines to be thus treated. He demands the homage of our whole being, and can only be worshipped with spiritual worship. That which we call God, and to which some of us present the paltry residue of a misspent life, is not the real Jehovah at all, but a miserable creation of our own fancy—a god that we have manufactured after our own depraved imaginations. St. Paul's religion was not the residue, but it was the whole fabric of his life. "To me to live is Christ."

I cannot help thinking that it might have a very useful as well as startling effect upon a large number of nominal Christians if they were to put down these five words on paper, and then fill in the sixth after careful self-examination: "To me to live is ——" What! Could I with any degree of truth employ such language as this of my life? Is my experience at all like it? Am I even aiming at this point, or expecting that anything like this should ever be attained by me? "To me to live is Christ." And I would here point out to you, my dear friends, that this is not a sort of rule of perfection which only the greatest saints can hope to live up to;

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rather it is a description of true and normal Christian experience. We deserve the name of Christian just in so far as this is true of us—"To me to live is Christ;" and if not true of us we may perhaps deserve the name of Moralists or of Legalists; but the name of Christian we do not deserve, because this is the differential feature of true Christianity.

Let us endeavour to get a clear view of what the Apostle meant, and that we may do so we shall do well to dwell for a few moments on the words, that we may be able to fathom their depth, and to grasp their full significance. What are the thoughts suggested to our minds by this utterance? What did he mean when he said, "To me to live is Christ?"

The first thought is surely this, that the Apostle had received Christ into his nature by faith in Him; that he had turned his back upon the old life, and entered upon the enjoyment of the new, which has its source in the Person of Jesus Christ Himself. St. John teaches us that to believe on the Name of Jesus Christ is to receive Him, and here it is that true spiritual experiences commence. Until we have received the new life we cannot live the new life, and it is only he that hath the Son that hath this life. It is evident then that we cannot say, "To me to live is Christ" until Christ is our life, and He only becomes our life when we throw open, as it were, our nature to Him, and by faith take Him to be what He is—God's gift of everlasting life to us. Then it is that the Holy Spirit of Christ enters the once desecrated heart, and occupies our nature, takes possession of our affections, enlightens our understanding, awakens our desire, moves our will. And this is what St. Paul means when he says, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

No man can say, "To me to live is Christ" until he has thus received the Lord Jesus; and I would press upon you, dear friends, the enquiry, Have you thus received Christ Jesus? Whatever religious impressions may have been made upon your mind, if you stop short of this your religion is no better than a deception. You are still of the flesh, not of the Spirit, and to be carnally-minded is death.

How many go wrong here, to begin with! They desire that the product of their life should be *Christ*; but they do not realize that for this it is necessary that the essence of their life

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should be *Christ*. They know that, in nature, only the good tree can bring forth the good fruit; you cannot get "the full corn in the ear" unless the seed of corn has first been sowed; you cannot make a briar stem bring forth a true rose; and yet they fondly hope that they may be able to produce the character and attributes of Christ in their life without their having first definitely received Him by faith to be their new life, renouncing all confidence in their own resources, and trusting Him alone to make them what they desire to be.

Dear friends, you can't make the new Adam grow out of the old. Your fallen, ruined humanity can only reproduce itself. If the briar is to produce the rose, the rose-cutting must first be grafted on to it, and it must express its life through the rose, and if we would exhibit the new nature, the new nature must first be grafted on to us, and the new life introduced. "I live; yet not I!" exclaims St. Paul; "but Christ liveth in me," and only they who can say that will ever be able to say, "To me to live is Christ."

But there is more in the Apostle's words than even this, though indeed we have here the clue to all that they may contain or imply. When St. Paul says, "To me to live is Christ," he means doubtless not only that Christ has been received into His nature, but that Christ is the source of the power by which he lives; he finds all his resources in Christ, and hence he is "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." He says himself, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me;" and in another place, speaking of his outward work, he says, "I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

Some of you are starting upon the new life, and you feel as though a great deal were about to be expected and required of such poor weaklings as you; and your hearts sink within you at the thought of your own infirmity and the inadequacy of all your own resources. If any of you have such feelings as these you will understand why St. Paul so earnestly prayed for the Ephesian Christians, that they might know "what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in heavenly places." And you will see why, a little further on, the same Apostle goes on to pray that Christ may dwell in the



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hearts of these Ephesian Christians by faith. To know this exceeding greatness of power, to realize this indwelling presence of Christ, is to find ourselves, in spite of our natural infirmity, more than a match for any hostile force with which we may be assailed.

Herein truly lies the secret of genuine Christian experience. It consists in practical acquaintance with the power that worketh in us, and in the application of that power by faith to all the exigencies of daily life, and this power is, "Christ in us the hope of glory." Where Christ dwells in the human heart there power dwells, and every true Christian is thus possessed of adequate resources, and whatever opposing force he may have to meet he has nothing to fear, because he can say, "To me to live is Christ." Take care only that in the practical battle of life you draw your power from this quarter, and have no kind of confidence in the flesh. The man who is able to say, "The life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me," can face his foe with a calm and quiet demeanour, assured of victory even in the midst of conflict; for although we may fail, Christ has never been defeated yet, and never will be.

This leads us on to a third thought suggested by this pregnant phrase—"To me to live is Christ." What do the words mean? Surely they mean this, that inasmuch as Jesus Christ had been received by the Apostle into his nature, to be to him his new life, and inasmuch as he was drawing all his resources from that present Christ, he was himself becoming more and more possessed of those qualities and attributes which go to constitute the Christ-nature. So that we may say he was becoming not only more and more Christ-like, but he was becoming more and more Christ-possessed and therefore Christ-like. Because, as those who are possessed of the devil must needs grow more and more devil-like under the influence of the fiend that dwelleth in them, even so it is the possession of our faculties by Christ that renders us really Christ-like; as He dwells within us, so He reproduces Himself in us.

When we render up our nature to God, and the Holy Ghost is able to take more and more complete possession of us, He proceeds to form within us a new nature—the nature of the new Adam, a nature which is a transcript of the divine perfection. When the old spirit of evil was supreme within us, it

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sought to develop, and establish in us, the characteristic traits of fallen humanity—the old Adam, and thus it deformed us more and more from our proper type and character. When, on the other hand, the Holy Ghost dwells and works within us, He forms there a new nature, with new propensities and new moral characteristics, and this is really the Christ within who, in His human perfection, is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person. Thus the glory of God, emanating from His own Divine Person, is introduced into our nature, along with the Christ whom we receive, and, taking possession of our manhood, is reflected back upon the source from which it proceeds. This would seem to be St. Paul's meaning in a familiar passage, if we are to accept the rendering of the Revised Version: "We all with unveiled face *reflecting as a mirror* the glory of the Lord, are transformed from glory unto glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit."

Real holiness is "the real presence" of Christ in the believer's heart. Thus it is not too much to say that every true Christian should be in a certain sense an incarnation of the Divine in human form. Don't think me irreverent for using the word. I know there is a certain sense in which Jesus Christ was God-man in which none of us can ever be God-men; but there is also a certain sense in which we can be God-men; that is to say, men taken possession of by God, in whom the divine attributes are being developed and exhibited, and on whom the perfections of the Deity are being stamped—men who are being prepared to share the glories of the Son by their present assimilation to the divine ideal.

It is meet and fit that there should be a certain congruity of moral nature between the Bridegroom and the Bride. It is not seemly that the Bride should be of altogether lower moral order than her heavenly Bridegroom. It is the privilege and the duty of every true child of God to aspire to the glory of belonging to that elect company who shall constitute the Bride of the Lamb throughout eternity. But remember His Bride has to make herself ready, and unless we are thus being made ready by the formation of the new nature within our nature, we can hardly look forward with any degree of confidence to occupying that august spiritual relationship with the Son of God.

This great truth is eloquently taught us in that holy ordinance

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in which we are about to participate. Not only are our hearts stirred in the Holy Communion by the deed of commemoration, but we also feed upon the bread and drink the wine; by which we are taught the great lesson, that it is the purpose of God to impart to us a new life, and to form within us a new nature. This new life, through the divine humanity of Jesus Christ, is to flow into our life, and to form a new nature within our nature, so that we may become in a certain sense God-men, the Divine being communicated to and developing itself within our humanity. And blessed are they in whom this transforming process is going forward. But this ordinance is surely not only a symbol of this mysterious truth, but a means whereby the thing itself may be accomplished; for every time I approach that ordinance, my faith is stimulated to lay hold of this wondrous verity of the Christian religion; I am brought up to the point of receiving Christ as my new nature; I am brought up to the point of feeding on Christ, in order that that new nature may be more and more completely formed in me; and thus I pray, as I approach that Holy Table, that my sinful body may be made clean by His body, and my soul washed by His most precious blood, that I may evermore dwell in Him and He in me. He in whom this blessed process of spiritual transformation is being carried on can truly say, "To me to live is Christ."

Are we thus becoming an incarnation of the Divine? As the holy Being, who was Himself God, took upon Himself an earthly body, and introduced into that earthly body and that human soul all the perfect attributes of Deity, even so are we surrendering this earthly body of ours and our natural soul so completely to the Divine, that God can actually take possession of us, and make our nature the abode of Deity? Are we in this sense of the word "living Christ"? God grant that we may be! But, believe me, it is to this we are called; and only as we are rising up to this can we hope to obtain the proper prize of our high calling, our proper place in the economy of the universe.

This leads us to another thought, suggested by the words, "To me to live is Christ." Wherever Christ is He cannot be hid, and when He forms His own nature within it soon shows its presence in our lives. Thus St. Paul could truthfully describe himself as a "living epistle, known and read of all men," and as such he lived Christ before the eyes of his

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fellow-men. Those with whom He associated looked at Paul and saw Christ. As he moved up and down in the Church of the Philippians or elsewhere, or went forth to evangelize among the heathen, he carried Christ with him, and in all his work it was Christ that worked in him—speaking through his lips, looking through his eyes, and influencing the hearts of others through that consecrated heart of his. So he could truly say, "To me to live is Christ." The reproduction of Christ, so to speak, before the eyes of men was the practical outcome of his life.

And when we are thus incarnations of the Divine, our light will shine before men; for it is with us as with him, where Jesus is He cannot be hid. Dear Christian friends, remember the eyes of many are upon us, we may be very sure, and they are able to judge pretty accurately what the characteristics of our lives are; and they judge not so much by our profession as by our conduct. Men do not see Christ now, but they see us. And what do they see in us? Do they see Christ in us? When Peter and John stood before the judgment-seat of old, the rulers were constrained to take knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. Why did they so conclude? Because there was so much that was Christ-like in them that these men could not help seeing the connection. Is it so with us? The eyes of the world are upon us. Do they hear Jesus speaking in our conversation? Do they see Jesus working in our conduct? Oh, does the world, as it contemplates us, discover that we are so many Epiphanies of that Christ who is no longer visible Himself on earth?

Is it not a solemn thing to think of, that in a certain sense Christ has committed His character to us? Worldlings won't read the New Testament, won't study the character of Christ. They form but crude and imperfect notions of what He was, uttering occasionally vague platitudes about the perfection of His character. They don't study Him, but they study you; and if they see any inconsistency, any imperfection, any lack of beauty in your character, they will attribute that to your Christianity, and not to your lack of it. It may be obviously unfair and unjust to do so, as these infirmities may have been far more conspicuous in us before we ever made any Christian profession, but none the less they will do so; and oh, how careful we need to be, lest haply we give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme!

Let us take this to heart; for remember it is not enough



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that we should abstain from what is grossly sinful. Men of the world expect something more of us than that. In Psalm xc. we pray, "Let the glorious beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!" and it ought to be. If a Christian is fretful, anxious, morbid, people will see it, and set it down to the discredit of his religion; and when this is the case, you are found false witnesses of the Christ who has, as we have said, submitted his character to your keeping.

Incarnations of Christ! Alas! strange distortions of the Christ, some of us rather deserve to be called. Here are some of us hard and censorious, with very little of the gentleness, tenderness, and delicacy which were so conspicuous in Christ about us. Others fretful, irritable, and flurried, as though we were strangers to the quiet and the calm which is the atmosphere in which Christ lived. Others of us have positive faults that lie on the very surface of our lives, known and read of all men. Some Christians, for example, are great talkers, and a great deal of their talk had far better be left unsaid; aye, and sometimes loose talkers too. People listen to the rattle of their tongues till they are tired, and then they turn with a feeling of profound scepticism from the profession of a faith that leaves the little member so completely untamed. And some not only talk, but gossip, and that is worse still; and some not only gossip, but gossip spitefully, and that is worst of all. And all that sort of thing becomes an argument against religion. And these faults and failings are only samples of many more, which, lying upon the very surface of the lives of us Christians, would contradict us were we to say, "To me to live is Christ."

If we ask how it comes to pass that Christ is so little the product and outcome of our lives, surely the answer must lie here. We reproduce Him only very partially and indifferently because we receive Him so reluctantly, and surrender ourselves to Him so unwillingly. We are slow to be emptied of self, and so He cannot fulfil us with Himself. We demur about yielding our members, and so He cannot make them the instruments of righteousness unto holiness, and we are not transformed into His image, because we do not leave ourselves plastic in His hands.

Christ cannot share the sovereignty with self. Where we shrink from self-denial, the God within cannot assert Himself, and so the "end of our conversation" (that is, the outcome of

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our mode of life); is not Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, but a miserable travesty of His perfections.

This brings us up to another thought suggested by the words. St. Paul, you will observe, is here specially referring to the object and purpose of his life. He tells us that, so far as his own enjoyment was concerned, to depart and be with Christ was far better; but he had his work still to do, and for this work he was content to live, and this work was to reproduce Christ, as in his own life, so in the lives and hearts of others. Hence to him to live was Christ in this sense, that it was the great aim and object of St. Paul's life to extend the supremacy of Christ over human hearts.

What did Paul of Tarsus live for? Suppose the question asked of any of his contemporaries, even of his enemies, do you think there would have been any ambiguity about the answer? They might have called him a fanatic, or enthusiast, or an impostor, but there would have been no question as to what it was that he lived for. All would have agreed in testifying that his whole life was given up to the promotion of the cause of Christ.

Would an equally unequivocal testimony be borne to our lives by those who know us best? If I were to ask your neighbour what you lived for, would he be constrained to speak of you as a neighbour of St. Paul would have been constrained to speak of him? Or would he say, "Mr. So-and-so is a smart man of business; makes a lot of money; gets on very well in the world." "What does he live for?" "I am sure I don't know. What we are all living for, I suppose—to do the best he can for himself." "I thought he was a religious man?" "Oh, yes; I forgot that. I believe he does make some religious profession; but his religion doesn't sit very heavily upon him, nor exercise any very apparent influence on his life." Would that be the testimony? In other words, "Mr. So-and-so is an active, energetic man of the world, and in addition to his other qualities and qualifications he possesses a certain modicum of religion." Could any neighbour have even thought of describing St. Paul after that fashion? Could any have spoken of him as one who lived mainly for money-making, or for commercial success, or for social and domestic enjoyment? Why his whole life would have given the lie to any such description of him.

My dear friends, should we be equally free from any

*"To me to live is Christ."*

danger of being so described? Do any of us seem to be living mainly for our business concerns, or for our domestic duties, as we call them, or for the enjoyments and occupations of social life, while we tack on a certain amount of religiousness as a kind of appendage to a secular and worldly life? Examine yourselves, my dear brethren, for the enquiry is of the gravest importance. We are only down here for a very few short years, and soon the dream of life will be dreamed out, and it will be only a dream, unless we live for an object worthy of life. For what are we living? What is the specific object that we have before us? "*To me to live is Christ.*" Can we say that? To glorify Christ, to speak for Christ, to promote the kingdom of Christ, to do the work of Christ, to set forth the praises of Christ, to extend the influence of Christ, to prepare the way of Christ, to hasten on the final revelation of Christ, this is the life of him who can truly say, "*To me to live is Christ.*" How many of us can say so?

Fancy anybody describing St. Paul after this fashion: "What do I think of Paul of Tarsus? Oh, he is a great man in the tent-making line! He is doing a very thriving business, and making a very good thing out of his tents. He will be about one of the largest tent-makers in Asia Minor soon, if he goes on at this rate. What a number of orders he gets! It is wonderful how he is pushing his way in the world. I fancy he is a religious man too, and takes a considerable amount of interest in Christian enterprises; but the main thing with him is the tent-making." Imagine a man talking about him in that fashion. How incongruous with what we know of his character the bare suggestion seems! How out of harmony with our ideas of the great Apostle of the Gentiles! But not even his slanderers could speak so of him. No; the motto of his life was, "*One thing I do,*" and he kept to it without deflecting to the right hand or the left, and all other things were made to bend to this. There could be no doubt or question what he was living for. Oh, fellow-Christians, of how many of us can the same be said? Is this our law of life, "*One thing I do*"?

I do not mean to say that you are to spend all your days in prayer, or that you should give up your daily occupation, and go about distributing tracts. There are other things to be done besides that. But whether you are a domestic servant or a cabinet minister, a successful merchant or a chimney-sweep, a wealthy lady or a poor seamstress, one golden rule is to cover

the whole range of life's experiences, extending to the most important, and affecting the most insignificant. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." This is the one great end towards which all is to be made to contribute, and which is never to be lost sight of or superseded by other and lower aims, and it is the presence of such a purpose in life that sanctifies and hallows all.

St. Paul was glorifying God as well when he was making his tents as he was when he was preaching the gospel. If you and I had gone into his habitation, and seen him working away at the awl and thread after a hard day's labour in preaching the gospel, and had said to him, "Is this worthy of the dignity of a minister of Christ? Have you nothing better to do than to make tents?" I believe he would have smiled, and said, "I am pleasing God as much by driving home this awl as I was in driving home His truth a few moments ago, for I am doing it for Him. I do it that I may be provided with the necessities that I require in order that I may lay out my strength for His service." But if he had been constrained to say, "I am making the tents for my own emoluments, to better my position, and to enable me to get on in the world," how different it would all have been.

I do not wish to preach asceticism. I do not mean to say that God grudges us reasonable enjoyment, or denies us a share of the gratifications that may fall to our lot in life; but I say that when a man makes these an end—when he goes out of the way to seek for creature comforts, and devotes himself to what men of this world call gain, and to push himself forward in the race of social emulation—when he makes these the object for which he is living, he ceases to do one thing; he is doing many things, and if we do many things the one thing needful will very soon become an inconsiderable portion of our lives, and no longer will it be true of us, "To me to live is Christ."

The service of Christ *can never be a by-work*. It must needs be either everything or nothing; a great purpose running through all our life and colouring all our experience, or a vapid sentimentality—a hollow profession. The claims of the cross are imperious—"Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price: wherefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are His;" and we can only escape from these claims by turning our backs upon that cross. St. Paul accepted those claims, and responded to them right loyally. His companion Demas



*"To me to live is Christ."*

repudiated them, and so turned his back on the cross, and on Him who was crucified upon it. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." And so, to St. Paul, to live was Christ, and to die was gain; to Demas, to live was the world, and to die was the loss of all.

But do you think that Paul lost and Demas gained even in this world? Nay, verily there is yet a further significance in these words, and this brings us to it. It shall be our last thought, and it is this: When the Apostle says, "To me to live is Christ," he is comparing earth with heaven, and the enjoyments of earth with the enjoyments of heaven; and though he admits that heaven is far better, he conveys the idea that such a life as he led on earth contains, at any rate, one principal feature of the blessedness of heaven.

This much at least is clear, when a man thus takes Jesus Christ to be his life he will have Christ to enjoy as well as Christ to live for, and as well as Christ to live by. This is the true secret of a life of blessedness. Wouldest thou be supremely happy? Wouldest thou anticipate here on earth the delights of heaven? Wouldest thou share the felicity of the bright beings that shall stand round the throne, or who even now in Paradise are already with the Lord waiting for the fulness of their final bliss? Wouldest thou know something of the days of heaven begun on earth? Then respond to the aspirations of thy soul by taking Christ for thine *all*. The man who splits himself in twain, as it were, and lives a double life, partly for Christ and partly for self—partly for heaven and partly for the world—will neither be able to enjoy the pleasures of selfishness and worldliness, such as they are; nor will he be able to enjoy the pleasures which emanate from Christ, such as *they* are. The man who can say, "One thing I do," who turns his back on lower aims, surrenders himself to the power and influence of Christ, giving up body, soul, and spirit to be transformed into the divine image—that man shall know the blessedness of enjoying Christ.

To live such a life is to be filled with Christ, is to feel Christ ever near, to dwell in His society, to draw from His presence continual consolation, to be strengthened by His might and cheered by His smile; and this is life indeed. To such a Christian Christ becomes an earthly heaven. The Lord is even now the portion of His people, and His own can say, "The lots have fallen unto me in pleasant places, and I

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have a goodly heritage. Come poverty or wealth, come loss or gain, come sickness or health, come life or come death, come time or eternity, nothing can rob me of the secret of my joy so long as Jesus Himself is mine." Oh, do we know what it is thus to live Christ! how much we lose when we lose this, how much we lose when we lose Him! Talk about self-denial. Ah! this is the real self-denial, when we deny ourselves the pleasure of knowing God, when we deny ourselves the glory of being crowned by God, when we deny ourselves the deep inward gratification of being satisfied with God, and we deny ourselves the full fruition of our nature in being united to God.

This is the real self-denial. Talk about self-denial, what do we deny ourselves if only we have Him—if He becomes to us more and more our all in all, our joy in sorrow, our light in darkness, our strength in weakness, our victory upon the battle-field, our heaven on earth? Oh, if Jesus be all this to us, speak not of self-denial! Surely we are promoting our own true self-interest, we are increasing our own wealth, we are administering to ourselves the truest satisfaction, when we count all loss for His dear sake, and suffer, if needs be, the loss of all things that we may win Him.

"To me to live is Christ." I have done; but ere I leave this pulpit one last word to any who have not yet entered upon this life. My friends, to you to live is—what? what? Go home, take pen and paper, and just write out those words, "To me to live is —," and then fill up truly the blank. What is it?—vanity, passion, sin, worldliness, impurity, covetousness—what is it? Do you answer, "Nothing?" Has your life no object? Then write that "to me to live is nothing. I have nothing to live for that deserves the name of an object, no purpose in life worthy of the dignity of my manhood." "Vanity, vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Which of the two lives do you like best—"To me to live is Christ"? or, "To me to live is emptiness, hollowness, unreality?" Make your choice; and if you long for something better than you have hitherto known, dare to draw near to-day; dare to draw near to Him who is the true source of life. Cast yourself down before before His mercy-seat, and cry—

"Thou of life the Fountain art,  
Freely let me take of Thee;  
Spring Thou up within my heart,  
Rise to all eternity."



## Imitators of God.

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.”—*Eph. v. 1.*

**L**ITERALLY: “Become ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children.” These words may be regarded as indicating the great subjective object of our lives. God’s purpose concerning us is to conform us to the image of His own blessed Son. Our purpose concerning ourselves in our own life and conversation should be to become “imitators of God as dear children.”

Man was originally created in the image of God; but observe, in His image potentially rather than actually—just as the child is the image of the man, or, as we may say, the acorn contains potentially the image of the oak, inasmuch as it contains within itself that which will develop into the oak. Man was made innocent and pure, and so far in the image of God. But the positive attributes and qualities which are God’s highest glory, and by which His glory is to shine forth through humanity, could not be exhibited till man had been submitted to a probation. Only by the development of innocence into holiness could man attain in the actual and full sense of the words to the image, the moral image, of God; and to attain to this is the great object of human probation.

God placed man in an extraordinary and altogether unique position. He who had created already no doubt countless intelligences of the heavenly world, and placed them in such a position as to be able to enjoy the light of His presence, and live under the consciousness of His control, placed man in a position altogether different, and submitted him to other conditions. “What is man, that thou art mindful of him,” exclaims the Psalmist, “and the Son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels that thou mightest crown him with glory and honour.” Man is placed a little lower than the angels in that he lives in this lower world and under the limitations of sense, and is not as yet allowed to enjoy the vision of the Almighty. His sight cannot penetrate into the world of mystery that lies beyond. He

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cannot as yet gaze upon the realities of the eternal world. He has to walk by faith, and not by sight. He lives in a material world, surrounded by the temptations that naturally arise from such conditions of existence; and in such a world he is called to live a life of superiority to the conditions by which he is surrounded. Amidst material objects he is called to recognize and to contemplate the unseen, and to present all the faculties of his nature in willing homage to a divine Being whom he has never beheld, and of whose very existence he has had no direct sensible evidence.

These extraordinary conditions of existence have been imposed upon him as a means of educating, training, and developing him with a view to his attaining an ultimate destiny of glory, as much more exalted than that of other created intelligences, as his present position is inferior to theirs. Man is designed, in the economy of God's grace, to attain a position of unique glory, to which even the angelic beings, so far as we know, cannot aspire. We are nowhere taught to believe that angels are to be so united to the Son of God that they are to constitute His Bride in the age that is to come. But this is predicted of the Church of Christ. She is to be passed through the purifying and developing processes of probation, in order that those moral qualities, which may justly be designated divine, may be formed and matured in her; so that when at last her day of probation is past, and the great end which God has had in view is accomplished, she may stand forth before all, as the very reflex of God's moral glory, and may thus be in a position to enjoy that complete union with the Divine, without any loss of individuality or of individual consciousness, which is the highest conceivable blessedness of the creature.

It is most important, then, that we should understand that this is the great object of our lives—that we are called not merely to escape from the terrible penal consequences of our sin, but to rise to so high a level of spiritual experience and to so exalted a moral condition. We should bear in mind that the fall of man from primeval innocence may be regarded as a sort of accident in the history of the race. It was an accident of course foreseen by God, and provided for before the foundation of the world. But, so far as we can judge, it does not seem to have formed any necessary part of the original plan of God in His dealings with mankind. I mean to say that, so far as

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we can judge, it would appear that man could have risen to his proper position in the universe, and have attained to the prize of his high calling, without any such event as the fall.

When the fall had taken place, the first great necessity was that a remedy should be provided for it. That remedy had already been foreseen and foreordained, and in due time it was revealed in the atoning work of Christ. But I want you to observe that the provision of the remedy did not occupy the Divine Mind to the exclusion of the original purpose; rather, in the revelation of that remedy, God took care so to fashion the remedial economy of grace as that it should contribute to the promotion of His original design in calling man into existence. It would seem that the death of Christ under any circumstances would have sufficed for the redemption of the world. But Christ did something more than die; He became incarnate, and in our human flesh lived such a life as no other man had ever lived, in order that He might set forth in His own character, conduct, and experience what it is that God designs to be the out-come of human probation.

Jesus Christ not only died, but lived—lived a life of perfect and complete obedience—in order that by that life He might bring within our view the image of God displayed in a truly perfect man. Thus the divine image lost in the fall has been restored to humanity in all the completeness of its moral beauty in the incarnation, and as we contemplate it we learn to admire it, and become enamoured of it. In that revelation we have an opportunity of seeing both what God is and what man is designed by Him to become. God is revealed to us in human form, as a man possessed by the Divine Spirit and perfected in the divine image, and hence the provision to meet the necessities of our fall is also a contribution to the original purpose of God with respect to humanity.

Thus it is that we have to thank God for our very fall, in that He has brought a greater good out of our evil. If man had not fallen, God would no doubt have devised some other means of making a sufficient revelation of Himself to us to meet and answer His divine purpose; but it is difficult to see how He could have made so wondrous an epiphany of moral beauty and perfection under any other circumstances than those which sprang out of the fall. But however that might have been, this much is plain, God has not only provided a remedy for our fall, but He has brought down His own moral

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glories within reach of our apprehension, clothed them in a concrete form, and presented them to us in Him who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Person, and who presents to us in His character and conduct the hidden perfections of God, which must otherwise have remained to a great extent a matter of speculation. Thus the special privilege of our position under the Gospel Dispensation is surely this, that we have the infinite Father exhibited to us in the finite human form and in the life of His Son. Hence, looking at Him, we behold as in a mirror the glories of the invisible God reflected in the person of Jesus Christ; and contemplating those glories, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of God.

As we have endeavoured to show then, we need to have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the object to be imitated, in order to imitate it; and then, when this is granted, we need carefully to study it. You cannot imitate the productions of a great painter unless you give your whole attention to that painter's style. It is not sufficient for you to have a general idea of the characteristics of his genius; you have to study the details of the works of art proceeding from his pencil; and only when you have made yourself acquainted with the various peculiarities of his style and the features of his work, are you in a position to become an imitator of that painter. And as with painting, so with every other art: we all know this.

My friends, it is even so with our spiritual life. If we are to become imitators of God, as dear children, we first need to have a model set before us in such a form as that we can comprehend it, and next we need to study the model so set before us. And we have reason to thank God that the divine model is brought down within reach of our finite powers of contemplation. If God had never been incarnate, and if Jesus had not come down to show Him to us, we might have been left to barren speculations about the divine character and attributes, as were the ancient heathen philosophers.

But He has not left us in the dark in this respect. How often has the thought that Philip of Bethsaida so simply expressed been present to the yearning hearts of men: "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Yes, that crowning revelation would surely, we might well conclude, meet and satisfy all the deepest longings of our heart. The vision of divine beauty



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would surely put us out of conceit of all lower ideals, of all less perfect comeliness, and the world would be robbed of its power to enthrall, and the flesh of its power to enslave, if only we could be satiated with the vision of God. And He who knows this inward craving of our hearts replies to us through human lips in the words that Philip heard: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works."

And this is surely the true answer to that dreary doctrine of the incomprehensibility of the Absolute—preached some time ago by an eminent thinker amongst ourselves, a Christian philosopher of no small repute—a doctrine which, if carried to its ultimate and practical issue, must be destructive alike of all true religion and morality. It was advanced by this author that because God is absolute, He is unknowable by the finite, and because He is unknowable, therefore His moral qualities may be totally different in kind from all that we understand by the terms employed to indicate them; that the "justice" of God, for example, may be a totally different thing from what we understand as justice, and His goodness a totally distinct thing from what we understand as goodness, and so on with each moral attribute in particular.

This position, as I have said, seems to me subversive of all true morality, while it strikes at the root of all reasonable religion. For if God's qualities are different in kind from what I understand by the terms employed, why may not the greatest criminals be nearer the standard of divine perfection than the worthiest of mankind? And how is it possible for me to admire, love, and, above all, trust a Being, of the nature of whose moral attributes I know practically nothing? Atheism itself were a relief as against the possibility of having to deal with such an *unknown God*.

But the answer to such an appalling deduction of a pitiless logic is to be found in the fact that the perfections of the Absolute are presented to us in a concrete form in the Person of Jesus Christ. As we gaze upon Him we see what God is, and what He desires us to think and know of Himself. And we find here that God's moral perfections are identical in kind with

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those qualities which we recognize as such, and after which we aspire ; that the justice of God is the same as that which we understand by the word justice ; that the love, the purity, the truth, the faithfulness, which we regard as attributes of Deity, are the same in kind, though fuller in degree, as those virtues which bear these names amongst ourselves. For we observe that never were these so perfectly exhibited as in the life, character, and teaching of Him who completely revealed to us the image of God.

Jesus Christ is the answer to all such speculation as I have referred to, and He silences once and for ever all difficulties that might arise from an undue straining of the truth that the Absolute cannot be known to the finite. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." As word is thought embodied in a definite form, so the Incarnate word is the Absolute Deity clothed in concrete form ; but the word reveals the thought, and even so the man Christ Jesus, the Incarnate word, reveals the Absolute, and makes known the Father.

Let me say, therefore, do not trouble yourselves because God seems so vast that you cannot comprehend Him, or because His attributes are so infinite that your imagination cannot grapple with them. Do not allow yourself to lose hold of the Divine Personality in the attempt to recognize His infinity. Rather rest your soul on the thought "God hath in these last days spoken to us in His Son, who is the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person." We need erect no altar to an unknown God, and worship we know not what, with a philosophic indifference as to what His character or attributes may be ; rather it is our privilege to know Him whom we believe, and to "acquaint ourselves with Him, and be at peace." For is not His name "Immanuel, God with us" ?

The Absolute apart from Christ is but a negation,—an abstraction which we only reach by endeavouring to divest our minds of all forms of limitation with which our experience has familiarized us ; but how much have we left to love, and to admire, and to trust in, when we have applied this denuding process like a sort of moral air-pump to our hearts and minds ? The Christ is no abstraction, but a man moving amongst men, the very embodiment of all moral loveliness, and we may behold His glory, "the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."



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But to become closely acquainted with this model, and to be able to imitate it, we need not only to have it, but to study it. And hence the necessity of the careful, painstaking contemplation of the Christ of the Gospels. Here we often fail. It is a common thing to find Christians pretty familiar with the Psalms, and tolerably well acquainted with St. Paul's Epistles, while they really know but little of the Gospels. And you will sometimes hear people speak as if the Epistles contained the fuller development of Christian revelation, while the Gospels only contained the germs of strictly Christian truth. Of course there is a sense in which this is true, for the Gospels are not doctrinal in the same sense in which Epistles are. But do let us remember this, that the supreme revelation of Christianity is given us, in the strict sense of the word, in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And it is therefore to the Gospels you have to turn, in the first instance, for your Divine Model.

We cannot, of course, afford to dispense with the Epistles and the doctrinal teaching which they contain; but these both derive their value from the facts of the gospel story, and lead us back to that supreme and crowning revelation; the conclusion of the whole matter with them may be said to be "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." The Epistles teach us how to use our model, and offer instructions upon some of its more prominent features; but the gospel story presents us with the model itself, and only by studying this can we become successful imitators. I believe that one of the causes of defective piety amongst us is the neglect of the careful study of the character of God, as revealed in Christ. We find justification in our Epistles, and then forget to seek the perfect Man in the Gospels, and no wonder that we are so little like Him if we do not even look at Him.

But to have the Model and to study it is not all that is required to render our imitation of God in Christ all that it should be. We must be careful not only to imitate the one true Model, but to imitate it in the proper way. And the true evangelical method of imitation is indicated to us in these suggestive words, "Be ye imitators of God as dear children." It is in the nature of things that the child should imitate its parent. As a matter of fact, children for the most part do imitate their parents. The child of a carpenter will probably never be happier than when he can get a hammer and a few nails and make as much noise with them as possible, while he

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is endeavouring to imitate the skill of his parent, although with very poor success. The child of the soldier will naturally select the toy sword or gun or a noisy drum for its plaything. The child of the clergyman will delight in addressing an imaginary congregation, or perhaps a congregation of chairs and stools, with much vehemence, if with no great amount of intelligence. But why multiply illustrations? It is a fact we are all familiar with, that the child imitates the parent, not because it is constrained to do so, but because it finds a pleasure in doing so, and that just because it is, as we say, its father's *own* child.

We may learn a great deal from this. The child receives a certain disposition by his hereditary relationship with his parent, and this disposition has a tendency to exhibit itself in his future conduct. If the child or the parent checks it and thwarts it, it may possibly be neutralized ; but if the tendency is encouraged, it becomes a strong force in moulding the child's character and shaping his life, so that he becomes in some measure a reproduction of his parent, or perhaps even exhibits the qualities of his parent in an aggravated or an intensified form.

My dear friends, if we are true children of God, there have been imparted to us certain instincts, desires, qualities, and attributes which are in their nature divine, and these will have a tendency to assert themselves in our life and conduct. To yield to such a tendency is to become imitators of God ; to check that tendency—and it may easily be checked—is to neutralize the privileges of our new birth, and to lose the special moral benefits which belong to us as the children of the Divine Father.

How important it is then that in our own personal experience we should watch over all within us that seems to come from God—watch over it with such care as the horticulturist would expend on some lovely flower—some rare and beautiful exotic in his greenhouse. These holy aspirations and purer instincts of which we are conscious have been introduced to our nature by divine grace ; they come not of earth, they have their home in the very heart of God Himself ; and hence as tender exotics they need to be guarded and protected against the cold breath of the blighting frosts of this wintry world of ours, which would kill and destroy if possible every flower of Paradise. Give place at once to all that you have reason to

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believe comes from God, and respond at once to those inward impulses and instincts which are of a divine origin. These are the motives of sonship, and by surrendering ourselves to these we shall fulfil the direction of our text—"Be ye imitators of God as dear children."

But there is something more than this suggested to us by the words. It is not merely that there are certain hereditary instincts which descend from the father to the child, but it is also the tendency of the close relationship which exists between the son and the father to strengthen these instincts, and to develop them into habits of life. In the first place this relationship usually evokes on the part of the child a feeling of admiration for the father. A little boy naturally thinks his father the greatest man in the world. If the Queen of England were introduced into his home, he would regard her as altogether a less important person than his parents. There is nobody so great in the eyes of a little child as his father or mother; and it is well that this should be so. And if we are the children of the Most High God, is it not more natural still that our whole being should be under the influence of a feeling of admiration for the great Father of spirits, from whom we derived our existence originally, and from whom we have received that new spiritual life—that life by virtue of which we live indeed? Oh, my friends, if I know myself to be a child of God, can I feel less admiration for my Heavenly Father than a little child feels for his earthly parent? There must be something strangely unreal about our sonship if it do not produce such a disposition as this.

This feeling of admiration yields an additional stimulus to those instincts of imitation to which I have already referred. With what interest does the little child look on while his father engages in his ordinary employment. What a wonder of skill it all seems to him! And this admiration prompts those unskilful little hands to attempt an imitation, however feeble. He would like to be able to do it because his father does it; and so he will not give it up, though his first clumsy efforts to imitate might seem discouraging. He perseveres in his endeavours because he has his father still before him, and because he is his child.

I cannot help thinking that it is possible for us to exhibit in our spiritual experience something like a servile imitation of God, when we only endeavour to imitate Him because we

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think it is our duty to do so, and we may bring punishment upon ourselves if we do not endeavour to fulfil this our appointed task. This servile imitation must lead us into the region of mere legality, and when this is the case our imitation will be a travesty rather than a copy; for when this is our motive one essential characteristic of a true imitation will necessarily be absent—the element of joyous spontaneousness which makes the imitation so specially well-pleasing in the great Father's eyes. And indeed an imitation of this servile type, I cannot help thinking, may be painful to the Father just because it ignores our filial relationship to Him. A true imitation begins within, in the condition of the spirit, rather than without, in our conduct; though the lessons that the inner spirit learns will surely express themselves in our outward actions.

If therefore we desire the true imitation of God let us see to it that we imitate Him as children, and as *dear* children. We ourselves are accustomed to use the phrase here employed in a sense with which we are all familiar. There are some children that are troublesome and wayward, and do not seem to respond to the affection that is lavished on them. Thus God is represented by the prophet Jeremiah as asking of His rebellious people, "Is Ephraim a *dear* son, is he a pleasant child?" implying that although a child he was, or had been, "a son that causeth shame." But there are other children who are a constant cause of satisfaction and pleasure, and of them we speak as "dear children." Thus it was that the Father spoke of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He was—what Ephraim was not—a dear Son and a pleasant child, and such we are called to be.

A dear child is surely not only a child who is an object of affection, but a child who reciprocates this feeling, and who renders the parents' love all the more intense by the warmth of its response to it. This word then, "beloved children," suggests to our minds that it is love, above everything else, that renders imitation easy. The child that loves most truly will imitate most successfully. This will take the weariness out of many an otherwise tedious task, and turn duties into pleasures. He who seeks to emulate a parent's proficiency in order to please that parent, and because his love is strong, will make far more rapid and satisfactory progress in every respect than he whose efforts spring from mere

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compulsion. If you can once get your child's affection enlisted in a sincere desire to please you, and lead him to imitate you just because he loves you, you can carry on his education with a pleasure and ease on both sides that cannot otherwise be attained, and accomplish much that would otherwise be impossible. Miss this and the education becomes a drudgery—you have to be continually urging on the pupil as with a goad, and to be insisting upon this and that being done until both the teacher and child turn with aversion from the wearisome conflict.

All this is equally true of us. He who seeks to imitate God because he loves the Father, and desires above everything else to please Him, will succeed far more rapidly and satisfactorily in his imitation than is possible under any other conditions. Such an one God Himself finds a certain pleasure in teaching, and to such He can make revelations of Himself that are not accorded to any save the children of love. Nor will He look with a censorious and critical eye upon our feeble and imperfect efforts to imitate Him. He may indeed from time to time check our vanity and deepen our humility by showing us how very far short we come of the divine standard; but even while we feel ashamed of our failures, He seems to whisper in our ear, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Nor does He grow impatient with us, though sometimes we may be impatient with ourselves, but, like a true Father, encourages our feeble efforts with the smile of His approval when He sees that they spring from a filial desire to please the Father's heart.

But, as I have said, imitation requires to be carried out in detail, and we have to study the work imitated in all its various parts if we would produce anything really resembling it. To speak of the moral characteristics of Christ as a whole would require not a single sermon, but a volume; nay, rather a library, if we were to do any justice to the subject. In the present passage, however, St. Paul calls attention to some of the more prominent features of the divine character, in respect of which we are to be imitators of God; and we will confine ourselves to a very brief consideration of these.

First he speaks of that kindness and tenderness which were so characteristic of Jesus Christ: "Be ye kind," He says, "one to another, tender-hearted." It is not enough that we should abstain from being unkind. We are called upon to be



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positively kind, delicate, considerate, and courteous. How kind He was whom we are to imitate! how gentle! how tender-hearted! There is scarcely anything in the life of Jesus that impresses us more than this. As He goes through the world, amidst all its sickening sights and sounds, He never seems to lose His quick sensibility. Distress never appeals to Him in vain; sorrow ever finds in Him true consolation, and want sure relief. Priest and Levite may pass by the stricken traveller, but the Good Samaritan cannot. He must needs go where he is, bind up his wounds, pour in the oil and the wine, lift him on to his own beast, while he trudges at his side, and bring him to the place of safety, and take care of him. Ah, my brethren, what an exhibition of kindness and tender-heartedness we have presented to us in every phrase that I have quoted, and well we know that (perhaps unwittingly) the master-hand that drew this wondrous picture was leaving us a portrait of Himself.

It was not enough with Christ that He should go about doing good, but He must needs do His good—*how kindly!* How tender He was to that poor sinner that fell weeping at His feet, of whom Simon thought so harshly! How tender to that timid one in the crowd, who, when she came trembling and fell at His feet, heard Him call her “Daughter,” as if He had sought for the gentlest word language could supply Him with: “Daughter, be of good cheer, thy faith hath saved thee.” How tender He was to the blind beggar, standing still on His way to redeem a world until Bartimeus could be brought to Him! And not less tender to the rich Publican when he did the very thing that censorious religionists would have shrunk from doing—invited Himself to his house.

But time would fail us if we were to pursue this enumeration of His deeds of tender-hearted kindness; rather let me point out how we may imitate Him here. Dear Christian brethren, if we would really be of service to the souls of others, how much we need to cultivate this spirit of kindness, this sensitive delicacy! Take, for example, our work in those after-meetings, how much harm may be done by a rough intrusive manner, which gives those whom you seek to help the idea that you intend to force yourself upon them. How many are repelled from these helpful ministrations, just because of the lack of tact and delicacy on the part of those who engage in the work. Or, again, in Sunday-school and



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district-visiting work, how much of our failure is to be attributed to this lack of sympathy and patient kindness !

Nor is this all. It is grievous to think of how much of actual unkindness is from time to time exhibited by Christians in their relations with one another. How often does unfriendly gossip magnify faults that true charity should cover, and turn the small "hole in our brother's coat" into a gaping rent ! How few have the true kindness to tell a brother faithfully but tenderly of a fault—an unpleasant task which, however, neither Jesus Christ nor His Apostle St. Paul ever shrunk from, just because they were so truly kind ! Or, again, when Christians do attempt to speak the truth to each other's face instead of behind their back, how often is it done in such a harsh censorious way that those who should be helped are repelled, and a feeling of annoyance and resentment is awakened. Or peradventure the bruised reed is broken, and the smoking flax quenched. Well might the Psalmist pray that if the righteous did smite him friendly, and reprove him, their precious balms might not break his head. I am afraid there are a good many heads broken by these well-meant but clumsy ministrations.

How much of this unkindness too do we see in the theological world of to-day ! If a man is supposed to deviate in his views from the lines which each party lays down as orthodox, with how much censoriousness is he often treated by those who regard their own opinion as the criterion of truth ! Ah, how little of this kindness and tender-heartedness is there in the virulent party spirit of the period !

The next feature of the character of God mentioned here is His divine readiness to forgive—"Forgiving one another, as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." Here indeed the obligation to imitate Christ is peculiarly strong ; for have we not had much forgiven, and are we not continually requiring the Divine forgiveness ? All that we possess of grace and inward peace and blessedness springs from the forgiving love of the Father through Christ. We came to know Him first in His exercise of His offices of mercy ; and let us bear in mind that in exercising the same spirit to our fellow-men, we are imitating the most glorious function of Jesus Christ, and that in which He first exhibits His Father's true character to us ; so that in mastering a resentful and acrimonious spirit we do not merely gain the moral triumph of overcoming ourselves, but also the

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spiritual distinction of emulating in our little degree the crowning glory of the Deity. God shews forth His almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and forgiveness. How God-like is the man who by divine grace masters the resentments and animosities which may from time to time be provoked by the untoward conduct of others ! Very possibly there are times when we know ourselves to have been treated badly, and it is impossible to shut our eyes to the faults of others, just because those faults are committed against ourselves. Nor is there any use in doing so. Let us however, in such cases, remember that such treatment affords us an opportunity that we should not otherwise enjoy of imitating Christ, who prayed for His murderers, and died for those who crucified Him. None who cherish a bitter, unforgiving spirit, whatever their provocation, can ever be conformed unto the image of Christ.

This leads us to the third point in which St. Paul teaches us here to imitate God as revealed to us in Jesus ; and it is the grandest feature of all in the Divine Character that is brought before us here. Nay, rather it is the common element in which all other perfections meet ; for “God is love.” “Walk in love,” exclaims the Apostle, “as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.” Kindness lies on the surface of our lives, and has to do mainly with our outward manner and conduct ; but love is of the heart, its domain is within, where it lifts us from our native selfishness, and developes the divine. It is the genial warmth of that life-blood that floweth forth from the heart of God into ours, and makes us live indeed ! Of love we can say no less than St. John has said of it : “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him ;” for “God is love.” It is the very essence of Deity, and he who has most of it imitates God the best. We may indeed lay this down as a criterion of Christian progress, that just in so far as love becomes the dominant motive of our conduct—just as all other motives become subservient to this, so far are we rising to the true type, and being conformed to the divine image.

Walk in love. Well, how shall we do it ? How shall we become imitators of God in this respect ? We cannot create love by a mere effort of our will ; but we may expose ourselves to influences favourable to its development ; we may foster and cherish it, or we may check and hinder it—a thing which I fear too many Christians do. The instincts

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of love naturally exist within those who are born of God, because we inherit the Father's characteristics; and the disposition to feel a new love for all with whom we have to do, is an instance of that hereditary imitation to which I have already referred.

But love grows, and is developed by exercise. If instead of checking these early impulses we encourage them, and go on to love, not "in word or tongue, but in deed and in truth," our disposition to love will be strengthened by loving deeds and words performed or spoken in obedience to the instincts of love. We may help love by watching against that spirit of frigid reserve which is only too prevalent amongst worldly people, or that spirit of reckless independence which savours of Cain, but not of Jesus Christ, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Love grows by cultivating habits of fellowship and sympathy with those with whom such relations are possible, and by cultivating habits of compassion, by putting on, as St. Paul says, "bowels of mercies" for those with whom fellowship is impossible. We may foster love negatively also by watching against the narrowing instincts of selfishness, or against anything that tends to render us self-absorbed, for charity seeketh not her own; and to seek our own is to strangle the life of love at its very birth.

It is well too ever to endeavour to look at the lovelier side of human character, for most men have a lovelier side, and in Christian men this is the divine element. Let us recognize the divine, and love it, even while we may sometimes be pained and disappointed by the human. And when we cannot love with the love of congeniality, let us love with the love of compassion, responding to the divine instincts of pity, which are sure to make themselves felt within, by prompt efforts to benefit those over whom our hearts yearn; thus our love will grow strong by exercise, and be kept burning hot, as it has free course, and comes fresh and fresh into our nature as from the very heart of God.

The mention of Christ's gift of Himself brings us to the last point referred to here in which it is possible for us to imitate God. Let us become imitators of God in self-sacrifice. For self-sacrifice, wonderful to say, would seem to be the law of the divine benevolence. Here, I confess, we are in deep water, and it is difficult to escape being involved in paradoxes; yet I cannot believe that the Incarnation and the Atonement were

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any less a stupendous act of self-sacrifice on the part of the great Father of spirits than they were on the part of His Son. I cannot for a moment believe that the Father looked on unmoved at the sorrows of His Son, or that His knowledge of the certain blessedness of the result, as well to the Man Christ Jesus Himself as to the human race at large, rendered those sufferings in His sight no more than a mere histrionic performance. Surely the great Father of all sacrificed Himself in sacrificing His own Son. And Jesus stands before us as the image of the Father in this respect also. Herein shines out the wonder of divine beauty; herein lies the mystery of divine perfection. The gods of the heathen were supposed to demand sacrifice, that they might be propitiated and disposed to love mankind; God Himself submitted to self-sacrifice because He already loved the world. And because He would neither sacrifice His own law nor sacrifice us who had broken it, He sacrificed His own paternal love in permitting the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.

Be imitators of God in this. Selfishness is no attribute of Deity, though for Him all exist. He fulfils His will in His creatures by making them partakers of His own blessedness, and nothing less than this will satisfy Him. Men seek for greatness in self-assertion, in pushing their own fortunes, and advancing their social status. But the divine secret of true greatness lies in self-denial and self-forgetfulness, in the willing and cheerful surrender of our own rights and comforts and pleasures for the good of others. And although we do not this for the sake of gaining happiness, it is well to observe that herein lies the true secret of happiness also. The noblest joy is the product of the exercise of the highest benevolence, and the highest benevolence is the product of the most complete self-sacrifice. Thus it is indeed true that in losing our lives we find them.

Well, there stands *The Model*, and here within us, if we are really His, is the power to imitate it. Let us use that power, responding to the filial instincts of our new nature, and then the model will not have been presented to us in vain. And by-and-by, when we wake up in His likeness, we shall be satisfied with it. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every one that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, *even as He is pure.*"

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“And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”

MARK iv. 26-29.

NATURE is a volume written by the finger of God. Our blessed Lord was continually quoting passages out of this volume, and enlarging upon them; and he who passes through this world with his eyes open may find in the outward objects, which will continually attract his attention, many spiritual allegories full of important lessons.

Our blessed Lord in His allegorical teaching selected not unfrequently for His illustrations various conventional usages, with which his hearers were familiar. On other occasions, however, He drew His lessons direct from nature, and I think we must all be struck with this, that in this latter case the analogies are much more perfect, and may be pushed much further than in the former. Where our Lord's allegorical teaching is derived from conventional usages, we must remember that the customs of society are more or less capricious, and that therefore beyond certain prominent points the analogies soon begin to fail. But where our Lord teaches out of the book of nature, He draws His lesson from a vast collection of objects, specially designed for this purpose by that God of nature who is also the God of grace. He who said to Moses, with so much emphasis, “See that thou make everything,” the smallest as well as the greatest, “according to the pattern shown thee in the mount,” we may be very sure, in creating His own world, took care so to fashion outward and material objects as that they should be instructive illustrations of great spiritual verities.

The world, we believe, exists for a great moral object, not merely for those lower purposes which were attained ere yet man had come into existence. Earth was not merely designed to be an arena for the display of vegetable life, nor even of mere animal existence, but for a higher and grander because a



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moral purpose ; and therefore we may say, that just as Moses in making the tabernacle was careful to comply with the directions given him, in order that he might fulfil the moral and spiritual purposes of the tabernacle, so God in creating the world was careful to lay down such laws for that world, and to create such outward material objects, and endow them with such characteristics, as should serve for types and representations of those great moral processes which He had in view. The world was to be a book ready written for man to read.

There are perhaps no lessons from nature more striking than those which are presented to us from year to year in connection with the agricultural operations which supply us with the bread, that we are wont to call the staff of life, and which cover the whole course of the year, from seed time to harvest. All these operations lead up to the harvest, which is at once the crowning event of the year, and the explanation of all that has gone before.

In several passages in Holy Scripture our blessed Lord enlarges upon lessons suggested to our minds in connection with this subject ; but in other passages His teaching has to do with that which is incidental, and in some instances I may say accidental ; whereas in this particular passage, and I believe in this one only, he directs our attention to the essential and normal lessons conveyed to us in our regular agricultural operations and experiences. In the commencement of this chapter we have the well-known parable of the sower. There you will remember that there was seed scattered by the wayside ; but that was an accident. No man intends to scatter seed by the wayside ; it would be a waste of labour, as well as a waste of seed. Then there was seed scattered in stony places, and that we may say was also an accident ; for if the man had known that the ground was not properly broken up, he would not have wasted his seed by sowing it there. There was also seed scattered in thorny ground, and that too was an accident. If the sower had had any idea that the ground was full of thorn seeds, he would have had it properly cleaned before he placed the seed there. But here we are no longer dealing with accidents, but with the normal and essential lessons which agricultural operations and experiences are intended to convey. Let us proceed to consider them.



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And here I observe, in the first place, that we are in the habit of speaking about "the fruitful soil;" but has it ever occurred to you to reflect that no soil, as far as we know, is in itself fruitful? On the contrary, the mere earth, as earth, possesses no kind of power of production. It is a remarkable thing that it should have been reserved for a materialistic age to call special attention to the scientific fact—for I believe a scientific fact it is now proved to be—that life must proceed from antecedent life, and that there is no such thing known in nature as a spontaneous production or ebullition of life. And it is more striking still that it should have been reserved for one of the leading materialistic thinkers in a materialistic age to call special attention to this truth, and so far as a negation can be demonstrated, to demonstrate it.

The theory of the spontaneous generation of life from lifeless matter is now, I believe, almost universally abandoned, and it is generally admitted that life can only be propagated, so far as we know, by germs from antecedent life. With this conclusion the record of the world itself thoroughly agrees. We look back upon remote geological periods, in the far background of this world's history—a history written not in books, but in rocks and stones—and we find at last a lifeless world. There are certain rocks well known to geologists, which are what they call azoic rocks—rocks, that is to say, that have no sign of life about them. It is supposed that the world was at one time composed of materials such as these, and only of materials such as these. Endeavour if you can to form an idea of a lifeless world. Well, there is one within our sight. Turn your eyes from earth for a moment and gaze up at her whom we call the Queen of the night. There it is, a lifeless world. Turn your most powerful telescopes towards the moon, and you can discover mountains, valleys, deep, dark shadows cast by vast hills upon the plains beneath; but no sign of life all the wide moon over.

A lifeless world! There is soil yonder, but it is not a fruitful soil, and fruitful it never can be until some wondrous revolution takes place in the constitution of that planet. Even so there was a time when the world was a lifeless world. The elements existed out of which life was ultimately to be developed; but life itself did not exist, and by no effort of nature that is conceivable, by no birth pangs, or dire convulsion of a labouring world, could the tiniest form of animal or vegetable

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life be brought forth until the Creator Himself intervened, and created it.

Surely we have here a God-given parable, designed to illustrate a great spiritual verity. The Apostle speaks of the state of the natural man as one of death. The unrenewed man is "*dead* in trespasses and sins." Let us understand what he means by these familiar words. Such a man is not dead so far as his physical life is concerned ; he possesses this as much as the brute at his side. Nor is he dead as far as his reasonable soul is concerned, for it is to this that God makes His appeal. We conclude then that there is a higher spiritual nature in man, whose special function it is to hold intercourse with the Divine : it is indeed designed to be in each individual the connecting-link between God and man. This spiritual nature was originally quickened by the breath of God, and was sustained by the presence of God, and by intercourse with Him ; but when sin cut man off from God the vital force was forfeited, and could only be restored by a fresh gift of life on God's side. Hence just as the azoic or lifeless world was powerless to produce life, but contained within itself potentially all other capacities of production when once this was introduced, so man's spiritual nature exists *as a potentiality*, capable of producing the fruits of spiritual holiness when once the new and divine life is imparted to it, but otherwise utterly impotent and incapable of exercising its own proper functions.

Hence the necessity for that great change which St. Peter describes where he says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." Hence the necessity of receiving with meekness, as St. James puts it, the engrafted (or implanted) word which is able to save our souls. Hence the necessity of receiving Christ, who is the word of the Father, as St. John puts it—"To as many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe on His name, who were born, not of flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God." And hence St. Paul's statement, that if there had been a law that could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. Herein the law failed, and so it left our spiritual nature as fruitless as the world in the azoic periods of geology, and hence his cardinal doctrine, that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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The first thing needed then, if fruit is to be produced, is that the living seed should be sown in our spiritual nature, and this is effected, according to the teaching of St. Peter, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, and which in the gospel is preached unto us. The gospel then is the word of God *without*, preached in our ears ; but when this is received by us it becomes, *within*, the Word of the Father—the indwelling Christ, the seed of the new life. When the gospel message is preached to us, it is Christ that is preached to us ; and when by faith we receive the gospel message, not only into our minds, but into our hearts, it is Christ Himself that we receive, and He becomes “the Word of God” to us—“the implanted Word that is able to save our souls.” The word of God is then no longer a law without, but a character within—a law written upon the fleshly tablets of our hearts. But this living and incorruptible seed, once introduced into our spiritual nature, acts upon it as the first germs of vital energy acted upon this world of ours. It liberates, as it were, all our potential capacities, and draws by the mighty energies of life from our otherwise barren nature those forms of moral beauty, those fruits of holiness, for the sake of producing which we may say our spiritual nature exists.

Now let me ask, Has this seed been dropped into your heart? Have you received it? Have you, my brethren, so believed on Jesus’ Name as to receive Him? Has He entered into your once dead natures and breathed eternal life into your hearts? If He has not done this, then understand your efforts after holiness are all doomed to disappointment. You cannot live the life until you have the life; you cannot bring forth the fruit until your barren heart has received the incorruptible and life-giving seed.

The law, as we have seen, fails because it cannot give life ; but here where the law fails the gospel is strong. It brings within our reach the gift of life, and the first thing it does when we receive it is to infuse life into our dead spiritual nature, and by the power of that new life communicated to our nature we are in a position to rise to the claims of righteousness contained in the law. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [that is, the incorruptible seed which has a law of its own] hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” Now observe the object of this, as expressed in Rom. viii. 4 : “That the righteous claim of the law might be fulfilled in us,

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who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." The first great necessity then, if we are ever to have a harvest at all, is that the seed should be sown, and that it should be received and implanted in the soil of our spiritual nature, which then, observe, becomes fruitful, but which previously was barren.

Now for the next lesson. Very remarkable is the language employed by our blessed Lord in this parable, and very worthy of notice. He goes on to say that when once the seed has been sowed the man sleeps, and rises night and day, and the seed springs up and grows *he knows not how*. But He adds that "the earth bringeth forth fruit of *herself*." Now the word used there is the word from which we get the common English term "automatic," and I should not be wrong in rendering the words, "The earth bringeth forth fruit automatically." The earth may be regarded as a great automaton, containing certain mechanical laws within itself, and possessing certain chemical properties, which when once they are appealed to and set working, by the introduction of life, go on with the regularity which belongs to the movements of a machine. You don't make the seed grow by any interference on your part. You go forth into your field, and sow your seed, and having sowed it, you leave it. You don't say, "I must help that seed to grow," and then set to work to pick it all up, and submit it to some chemical process in order that you may ensure a harvest. Nothing of the kind. You leave Nature to herself. You know that the earth will bring forth fruit automatically. The great machine of nature goes working on; all you have to do is to comply with the conditions laid down by natural laws, and when you have complied with those conditions you are confident of the result, are you not?

Now for a lesson for ourselves. There are many of us who are very anxious to be holy, and that is well. But perhaps there are not a few of us who are somewhat petulant and fretful and impatient with ourselves, because we don't become holy as quickly as we should like. Years roll on, and the process of growth in grace is not so rapid as we should wish. We detect still within us the remnants of evil, and we fall far short of that standard of perfection which we have set before us in Jesus Christ. And the contemplation of this state of things sometimes induces depression, and leads to doubts and misgivings as to whether the work of grace has ever really begun within us at all. But then these doubts and fears have

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the effect of throwing us back and render progress impossible, and thus by our very efforts after holiness we seem to be kept back from rising to a life of holiness. Are we not sometimes like impatient little children, who sow their annuals in their gardens, but because they do not see the tiny plants come up as quickly as they expected, dig up the place to discover whether or not the seed is germinating properly? I have known a great many Christians perform an experiment of that kind upon themselves, and with what result? Why with the same result as falls to the lot of these little children. The process of germination is not sufficiently rapid to attract their powers of observation, and so they come to the conclusion that all is a failure; whereas if they had only waited and been patient, in due time they would have found Nature doing her work.

Even so it often happens that in their impatience to see that growth, which we ought to expect, Christians begin to doubt their standing before God, and to question whether their whole religious life has not been a delusion, and thus their confidence in God is shaken, and, this lost, progress is impossible. Or again, it sometimes happens that a sense of disappointment induces a kind of recklessness in some. They lose heart, and come to the conclusion that progress is not to be expected, and holiness is not attainable, and so they sink down to a level of experience altogether beneath their Christian profession. Others, less indolent, but not more happy, seek to make themselves holy by adopting strict rules of life, and struggling on wearily enough in their attempts at self-improvement; or perhaps they seek for what they desire in the adoption of some novel and perhaps very misleading theological system.

Now all these mistakes alike spring from our attempting to make ourselves holy, and from our impatience at our poor success; and from all these mistakes we might be saved, as it seems to me, by learning the lesson of our text.

Let me lay down then, with Nature before us, this great principle. It is not for you, my dear Christian brethren, by any effort of your own, to make yourselves holy. You cannot do it. First let the new seed fall. It is your place to receive it. You have done that, have you? Very well, then you have taken the first step. Secondly, let the new seed grow. Your business in this matter is negative rather than positive. It consists not in making the new seed grow—you cannot do that by any effort of your own—but rather in removing all



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obstacles to its growth—in watching carefully over it, in cherishing the tender plant, and in exposing it to those influences which are to foster and cherish it, and to cause its development in due course.

What are those influences in nature? Well, there is sunshine, and unless there is sunshine there will never be a harvest. Then there is rainfall, and the gentle dropping of the dew; unless the rain and dew water the soil there will never be harvest. The great lesson which nature teaches us in this respect is surely a lesson of faith. There is the field, with the seed planted in it, waiting, expecting, I may almost say, trusting. There it lies with its face turned towards heaven as though it would say, “Oh, sun, I look for thee to shine on me! Oh, rain and dew, I trust you to supply me with all the moisture needed to develope my crop and to ensure the harvest!” There lies the field in an attitude of expectancy, and an expectancy not doomed to disappointment.

You may perhaps be disposed to ask, “Don’t our wills come into play at all then?” Yes, certainly; no harvest ripens without labour having been expended on it; but how is the labour expended? It is expended on the preparation of the soil to begin with, or on the careful removal of all that might check or injure the tender crop, or be a barrier to the action of those natural forces to which I have just been referring. If there are stones thickly scattered in your field they might shut out from the infant germ the rays of sunshine that are so necessary to it, or they might distort or repress the germ in the course of its natural development. The careful agriculturist removes such stones as threaten to spoil his crop. If he is careless the crop may never grow at all, or may be a very imperfect one. Or again, if it should unfortunately happen that the field has received the germs of noxious weeds, and they are springing up and threatening to choke the seed, it becomes the work of the agriculturist to remove those evil things before they develope themselves to such proportions as to spoil the crop. In some parts of the world great pains have to be expended in clearing the field of superfluous timber which would interpose its shadows between the germ and the sunlight, or cut off the refreshment that might otherwise be derived from the passing shower. Your corn will not grow in the shade, and you must get your trees cleared away if you desire a satisfactory harvest. In the great American primæval forests this would be a most difficult

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part of the work ; and there are cases in spiritual experience where a similar clearance and sweeping away of useless umbrage entails no slight exertion of all our faculties of will.

Now, dear children of God, here is our lesson. Our part in the matter lies not in attempting to make ourselves holy, but in putting off and honestly repudiating all that militates against holiness, and in guarding against everything that would prevent us from being exposed to the spiritual influences that are to make us grow. Whatever comes between us and our true Sun of righteousness, whose genial beams, falling on our souls, alone can turn our barren heart into a fruitful field, needs to be cut away. Whatever prevents us from receiving the life-giving dew and rain of the Holy Spirit of God, must with jealous care be removed ; and whatever threatens to check the new life, and prevent its proper development, must be honestly renounced. Where this is done we may trust the incorruptible Seed to act upon our human nature as the corn seed acts upon the soil, and we may expect our nature to act, as it were, automatically under the influence of the new life thus introduced ; and while we thus yield our members we shall have our fruit unto holiness, and the end eternal life.

Now as the result of this automatic operation of natural laws, what have we ? We have described here a process of steady, quiet, regular, systematic growth. There are some people whose idea of religious life would seem to be that it consists in a series of fits and starts. Now we make a tremendous rush under the influence of some passing excitement, and then we fall back into a condition of stagnation or of backsliding. Then there comes by-and-by another flood tide, and then again another ebb. My dear friends, that is not a wholesome experience. I am aware that Christians sometimes need a special season of visitation to encourage and refresh them, and rouse them out of any grooves that they have formed—out of a routine that from its very regularity is in some danger of becoming barren ; but too often such special calls are rendered necessary by the languor and apathy that is exhibited in the lives of the Lord's people. Now surely true Christians ought not to need this. The ideal of Christian life is presented to us in what happens in our fields—gradual, steady growth.

With this lesson before us, let me guard you against two opposite errors ; first, the error to which I have already re-

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ferred—of being too impatient and petulant because progress is not as rapid as we expected; and, second, the error of becoming contented with a life destitute of all real progress whatsoever.

With respect to the first of these errors, let me point out that growth is a very gradual thing, so gradual as to be altogether imperceptible to the outward vision. You look at your field to-day, and you see no change from yesterday. You go to-morrow, and you discern no change from to-day; but the seed is growing all the while. Dear Christian brethren, we shall not assist our progress by being too anxious to gauge and measure it. Probably such attempts will only end in disappointment, or they may induce pernicious consequences. If we conclude that we are growing, we may be a little elated; or if we feel as if we had lost ground, we may be depressed; but in neither case is our real growth advanced by the process. You never saw a farmer go through his field with a foot rule and measure his crop. You never heard of a farmer going home to his wife, with a smile upon his face, and saying, "It has grown the ninetieth part of the eighth of an inch since last night." That is not the way farmers comfort themselves. They believe the seed is growing, although they cannot detect day by day the measure of its growth. It will not, they know, spring up in a night, like a mushroom—it will take its time; but it is sure to grow if the seed is good, and the weather seasonable, and the ground rightly prepared.

When, however, an agriculturist compares the state of his field in June with its condition in April, he can see a distinct difference, can't he? Even so with ourselves, if we are in a healthy condition, and we look back over a considerable period of our spiritual life (and souls grow much more slowly than corn, remember), we ought to be able to see some distinct signs of progress, should we not? We ought to be a little less childish, a little more spiritually-minded, a little stronger in faith, and a little more like Christ. Our besetting sins should have lost much of their power, and temptation should no longer influence us as we were once influenced by it. But this progress could not be detected from day to day, nor perhaps even from year to year, so gradual was its nature. If an agriculturist went into his field in June and found the condition of the crop no more advanced than in April, he would come to the conclusion that there was something wrong

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somewhere, and he would endeavour to find out what it was. And even so with us. If as years roll on we find we don't make any progress, we had better examine ourselves for the cause.

And this brings before us the second error that I have referred to—the error of being content to see no progress, and of ceasing to expect it. The earth brings forth fruit automatically, as we have seen; it is the law of its nature to do so. If it be not so then with us, surely there must be a cause. If the incorruptible seed has fallen into my heart, and been implanted there by the Holy Ghost, it is in the nature of things that I should bring forth fruit; and if I don't, it is necessary that I should ask myself the reason why. Perhaps you will find there is a blight. Alas! it is too often so. Some unhealthy, perhaps some deadly, influence has been allowed to pervade our life, and to mar and injure all. Modern science has not found out how to deal with the blight that sometimes affects vegetable substances. But, thank God, there is no destructive agency that can affect the spiritual life in the heart of man, but God has a cure ready for it. Blight, mildew, rust, or whatever it is, God knows exactly where to find the remedy, how to supply the cure. The fresh breath of eternal life from an all-healing God can sweep away all those destructive agencies that are causing so much trouble, and put the seed in a condition to grow again, if only you will, with humble faith, apply to "Jehovah-Rophi—the Lord that healeth thee."

But, dear Christians, whatever you do, don't fall into the terrible mistake—the fatal mistake—of supposing that progress is to be backward instead of forward. There are some who profess to have been true Christians for forty or fifty years, and they will tell you in mournful and lugubrious tones, "My first days were my best days." "Oh, for the sweet and ineffable joys of my spiritual youth! How glad I should be to have them back again; but of course that was in my 'first love.'" What would you think of an agriculturist who should talk in that fashion? who should go out into his field in August, and moan out, "Oh for the green blade of spring! Oh that I could only see my field as fresh and verdant-looking as it was in the month of March last!" What would you think of him? One thing I am sure of, you would feel much relieved at the thought that

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he was not your tenant. We expect something very different from the tender blade in autumn, don't we? and something much more to the purpose. The world may put its best first; but not so the Master, of whom it was witnessed, "Every man in the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now." And they who follow the Lord fully will find things get better and better as the years roll on, if only He lives in them, and they live by Him.

But now observe that while, as I have said, gradual, steady, progressive development in the spiritual life is what we have to look for, there may also be certain well-defined epochs or definite stages in Christian experience. Here these are indicated to us in the words that follow: "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." I turn to St. John's epistle for a commentary upon this, and I find there a similar division: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. . . . I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." There is the blade. Are your sins forgiven you? You hope they will be. What, my dear friend, have you not reached the first stage of development yet? Oh, take heed, I pray you, lest the harvest-time come, and find you not even yet in the blade! Do remember that the blade comes at the commencement, not at the close of the history of the crop; and forgiveness at the beginning, not at the end of the Christian life.

What comes next? "I write unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." What have we here? "Then the blade." Now here again Nature's object-lesson is very helpful. The ear, as soon as it appears, differs from the blade in this, that the plant has begun to assume its final and perfect form, that form in which ultimately the likeness of the original seed is to be reproduced. There is no apparent resemblance between the blade and the original seed, is there? But when the ear begins to form, then you see something like an embryonic representation of the perfect corn, and you can easily believe that it is corn you are inspecting. The image of the original seed is being reproduced. Now observe, St. John says of the young men that the word of God abideth in them. This Word, as we have seen, received through the gospel, becomes within us the indwelling Christ, who is the Word of



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the Father, and when He abideth within us He reproduces His own likeness in us. This likeness is scarcely discernible in the spiritual child, although He possesses the image of God potentially; but when Christ is being formed within us His image begins to appear, and men see in us a manifestation of the Divine. The Christ who dwells within cannot be hid, and they are constrained to admire Him for what they see in us.

Dear brethren, is it so with us? Does His word dwell in us, transforming us into His image, and rendering us living epistles, seen and known of all men? But the question may arise in your minds, Are these various stages distinctly marked, so that we can tell when we pass out of one into another? I reply, It is very hard to say, if indeed it can be said at all, when the one stage ends and the other begins, and yet we may be able to distinguish the different stages. To refer to St. John's figure. When does the boy begin to be a young man, and cease to be a little child? Nor can you say when the full-grown man becomes a father in this sense of the word. Yet you can say without any hesitation that one person is a child, and that another is a young man. The one condition of development is distinguishable from the other, and yet in normal growth the one stage glides into the other almost imperceptibly. It is even so usually in the Christian life—the babe gradually becomes the young man, even as the blade gradually becomes the ear.

There are, however, cases in which the transition is more definitely marked, and these cases too have their analogies in Nature. As a rule, the ear does not manifest itself in a moment; but under certain conditions there very often occurs in your fields a remarkably sudden change about the time that the ear begins to appear, that seems almost like a second birth. You go out one day and see all the calyxes of the wheat swollen, as if ready to burst. You know the ear is inside, but it has not yet made its way through that thick environment by which it is imprisoned. You say, "It will be out in a day or two." In the night there comes a shower of rain, and the morning sun rises with summer heat, and you go into your field, and you exclaim, "Dear me, what a change; the ears have all come out!" It has taken place, comparatively speaking, in a moment.

Now I believe there is a somewhat similar experience not unfrequently in spiritual life—an experience in which we pass,

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as by a step, from the child's state into the young man's condition, though I think they are in error who insist that so marked a change will always take place at this point. It often happens that, after years of elementary Christian experience, there arises in our spiritual life a certain sense of dissatisfaction with ourselves, a longing for something we have not yet attained. There is a deepening of our inward conviction of sin, of shortcoming, and of unworthiness. We are brought back again to the place of birth; we lie at the foot of the cross. There are within us strange searchings of heart—shall I call them the birth-throes of a new and higher life? We cannot continue as we are. There is a power within us struggling to assert itself, the ear is almost ready to burst through its environment, and shoot forth in all the beauty of its true form.

Ah, child of God, this is often a distressing experience! There is a hunger that nothing seems to satisfy, and thirst you cannot slake; and "blessed are they who" thus "hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." But perhaps you don't as yet see your blessedness, you only feel your pain, and you cry out in your distress, travailing in birth again, until Christ be formed within you. And then it is that you find yourself drawn again, as by an invincible attraction, to the cross, and you begin to relearn the first great lesson that you feel you had only learnt partially and imperfectly before; and as you lie there gazing, the deeper import of Calvary is, as it were, burnt into your soul. There you see your old man crucified together with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should not henceforth serve sin. There you learn afresh to judge with St. Paul, that if one died all died, and that He died for all, that we who live should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him. You begin to see that He died to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purchase us to Himself for a people of possession, zealous of good works. And while the vision of our faith thus rests on Christ we burst our chains, and break forth from our captivity into a life of resurrection strength and beauty, and so rise, as by a single step, into the second stage of the spiritual life—"first the blade, then the ear."

To those who are passing through such an experience let me say, Be of good courage; there are better things in store for you, and these sorrowful experiences are only leading you up to them. You feel your bonds now as you never did before,

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just because you are on the point of breaking away from them; the ear is endeavouring to burst through the folds and swathing-bands that confine it. Fear not, the hour of liberty is nigh.

And to you who have passed through all this, and reached the condition of the strong, vigorous young man, let me say, Don't think that you have already attained the measure of the fulness of stature. There are better things still in store for you. "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that was from the beginning." As little children we know the father after a simple, childlike fashion; but how little does the child know of the father, of his thoughts, feelings, character! But in maturer years the son begins to understand the father, and to associate with him on terms of sympathetic familiarity. Even so in our early days we know God as our Father, and rejoice to think of Him as such; but how little do we know of Him! As, however, we grow up to be young men, and as His word abides within us, we begin to know the eternal God revealed in the Christ after a very different fashion. We behold His glory, we contemplate with adoring admiration His perfections, we enter into His thoughts, and apprehend His purposes, and thus the full corn is formed in the ear. Such Christians are being transformed into His image, and reproducing the characteristic features of His perfection. There is about them a certain mellowness of Christian experience, a ripeness for glory, an absence of worldly-mindedness, and above all a quiet, calm apprehension of God, a life in the land of vision, where the sun never sets, and where the light never fades away. Thus God leads His ransomed on to the last stage of earthly development, and waits with eager expectation for the completion of His own work. Just as the farmer goes out to his field in autumn, casts his glance over his crop, and says, "If we can only have fine weather, it will be ready in another week," so the great God of heaven looks down upon the ripening soul with a smile of satisfaction.

"A few years more and the great work will be done. Look! he is ripening. I can see my own image in that man's life. I can hear my own voice in that man's words. Look, angels, principalities and powers of darkness and light. Have you seen my servant yonder, on whom my sun has shone, and on whom my rain has fallen for many a year, and in whom they have done their work? See, the harvest-day is drawing near! The ripeness and the beauty of heaven is appearing in him.

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And by-and-by, when the eye of God, watching the whole process with a tenderness and interest I cannot describe, discovers at last that the great work is accomplished, and the fruit is fully brought forth, "*immediately* He putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

I love the word "*immediately*" on the lips of St. Mark. How many important lessons does it teach all through the gospel! but never does it speak more eloquently and forcibly to my mind than it does here. It is just as though God were bending down, sickle in hand, waiting for the last signs of spiritual ripeness, as if impatient for the moment of fruition. Blaze down, O sun! blow, soft autumn winds! descend, gentle dew of heaven, and bring the fruit to perfection! And then when the proper moment arrives His love will not let Him tarry. Why should the happy soul lose for one hour the joys of Paradise, the blessedness of being for ever with the Lord! Quick as the flash of lightning, the sickle is thrust into the field, and the whole hosts of heaven shout for joy as the harvest of earth is reaped into the heavenly granary, and God looks upon it with the satisfaction that springs from an infinite love—"Harvest-home! harvest-home! harvest-home!"

Here we find at last the fruit of all this toil, the reward of this Divine perseverance; this patient waiting through the vast untold periods ere man began to exist; this patient waiting all through the long, dark ages of human history; this patient waiting in each particular case. The farmer gets his reward at last, and shall not the great God get His reward also? Think of the joy that wells up in His heart. Think of the triumphant utterances that shall pass from his lips as He calls the vast universe together, and before all the intelligences of heaven exposes to view the ransomed Bride of the Lamb. There she stands in all her virgin beauty, in all the maturity of her grace, and God Himself rejoices over her with singing. Not in vain the tears of Gethsemane, and the bloody sweat. Not in vain the pains of Calvary, the darkness and the horrors of death. Not in vain the mighty motions of the Holy Spirit. The end is reached at last. The harvest is reaped. "Harvest-home! harvest-home!" Open the heavenly granary, and store it with the fruits of the earth. God Himself hath sown in tears, let Him reap in joy. "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes!"

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"Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased. Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."

EXODUS xv. 13-18.

WE are perhaps hardly surprised at the tone of jubilant confidence which pervades this glorious psalm of thanksgiving. Very strong indeed is the language used on this occasion; but perhaps not stronger than might naturally have been expected to spring from such circumstances; for what a wonderful event had just transpired! A few short months ago, and how improbable that anything like this vast and stupendous revolution should ever take place! How utterly improbable that a nation of slaves, held down as with an iron hand by the ruthless tyranny of the proudest monarch of the period, should ever emerge from Egypt, assert their national independence, and exult in the acquisition of liberty!

And yet these most improbable events were actually accomplished facts; and the Israelites, intoxicated with wondering joy, gazed upon the heaving waters of the Red Sea, which was the tomb of their foe, and beyond it to the distant shores of Egypt, and knew that from that land, where they had endured so much misery and had been so ground down and oppressed, they were delivered for ever by the intervention of the God of their fathers. Jehovah had shown Himself more than a match for all the forces of Egypt; and as they contemplated the wonderful deliverance that had been wrought, as they reflected upon the circumstances of the case and considered the means by which that deliverance had been wrought, it is not surprising that



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they felt within their hearts that the God who had done this could do anything ; that it was no longer reasonable to limit His omnipotence. Whatever obstacles might still lie in their way, and whatever difficulties were still to be encountered, one thing was sure—that He who had begun the good work for them could carry it on to a triumphant issue.

I say we are hardly surprised at the strength of the language that is here employed. And yet certainly it is very strong ; for when you come to think of their position at this moment it was one that might have seemed very trying, and almost forlorn. There they stood, on the farther shore of the Red Sea, with a vast desert stretching before them, and a considerable distance to be traversed over those dreary burning plains before they could hope to enter upon the conquest of the land of Canaan, even supposing they were in a state to attempt such a conquest. Through that desert who was to be their guide ? And while they were making their way across it, who was to find their needful supplies ?

It is well, my dear friends, in considering this narrative, to try and present their case to our minds in such a manner that we may realize the gravity of the difficulties that had to be faced. Just reflect upon what has happened before our eyes quite recently in that very country, and perhaps not far from the very spot where the Israelites were standing at this moment. Only a short time ago we were taking up our newspapers morning after morning, and eagerly glancing at their contents, and then flinging them down with a feeling of disappointment, because the great victory which we were looking forward to, and which was to put an end to the horrors of war, seemed so long delayed. And what was the cause of the delay ? Just this, that our general was making sure that his commissariat department should be in perfect working order. He felt that it would be extreme temerity, amounting almost to madness, to hazard a march across the desert without a proper commissariat supply. By so doing he would have been risking the lives of his soldiers, as well as the success of the campaign. And we remember how much trouble he had in ensuring the necessary supplies. Locomotive engines had to be brought from a distance, mules and other beasts of burden had to be purchased at a very large cost in distant lands, and brought over to the scene of action, in order to furnish the necessary commissariat appliances and to bring the

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supply within reach of the army. And yet our army, after all, was only a very small thing as compared with the hosts of the Lord who went out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. I suppose they were between two and three millions strong, if you include women and children, and you may imagine how vast a supply would be required to meet the wants of such a multitude as this.

Here they were then, on the other side of the Red Sea, the vast wilderness stretching before them, their long weary march not yet commenced, and wholly destitute of any adequate supplies, and without either arms, or discipline, or any capacity for warfare. Surely the prospect might have seemed most discouraging. They must have known perfectly well—what they soon found out to be a fact—that the wilderness swarmed with wandering nomad hordes, Bedouins of the desert, men of war, who might at any moment come down upon them, cut off their stragglers, or even put the whole undisciplined rabble to rout and make a prey of them. There was not, I suppose, a single experienced soldier in the camp, nor had they either weapons or skill in using them. Neither horses nor chariots, nor even camels, that have well been called the ships of the desert, were at their command, while there were sturdy warriors of the desert who had to be faced before the Israelites could make their way into the promised land.

And even supposing they should overcome these difficulties of the journey, what then? There lay Canaan before them, but how were they, who could hardly hold their own against the tribes of the desert, to undertake aggressive warfare against nations dwelling in cities with walls great and high, and equipped with all the appliances of ancient warfare? How chimerical their enterprise would seem on reflection! how improbable that they would ever succeed in taking possession of the land which God had promised to them! In fact, although they had been just witnessing so splendid a manifestation of divine power, if they had paused to reflect upon the probabilities of the case, they might have come to the conclusion that the undertaking was, as I have said, wholly chimerical, and that their wisest plan would be, even in the very hour of triumph, to make the best terms with the Egyptians that they possibly could.

But faith looked on beyond all difficulties. Faith never stops for commissariat supplies. Faith does not ask, Where is my daily bread to come from? Faith does not wait to be clothed

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with armour, save such armour as the power of God supplies. Faith does not stop to weigh the adequacy of the means within our reach to induce the end. Rather, Faith steps boldly on, content to be persuaded that God makes no mistakes; that those who array themselves under Him shall, in one way or another, find their resources sufficient, and that He in whom they trust will never fail them.

So they stand there singing their song of expectation at the very moment of triumph; at the commencement of their career, they look right on to the close. They use not only words of hope, but of anticipation, so confident and strong that they speak of the victory of the future as though it were a thing of the past. Here they are, on the banks of the Red Sea, miles and miles before them with nothing but a waste of desert, miles and miles of barren, burning sand, without water, without pasture, without habitation; all this has to be traversed before Canaan can be reached. And yet listen to the words of confident anticipation which they dared to utter: "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed." He had only led them forth a single night's journey, but in that single night's journey they saw the completion of the whole long journey they were to take. "Thou hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: *thou hast guided them* in thy strength into thy holy habitation." Why they have got there already! Yes; and they have too. In the anticipation of faith they have already taken possession of the promised land. In the anticipation of faith the walls of Jericho are already prostrate, the sons of Anak already subdued, the nations of Canaan have already melted away. In the anticipation of faith victory is already obtained before the war has commenced.

When we come to ask ourselves the secret of this triumphant anticipation we shall find that it is all expressed in one single sentence—"Thou hast *redeemed*." Yes; there it was. I would have you observe that the joyful confidence of the Israelites, sprang not merely from the abstract consideration that the God who had shown Himself so strong to save already, was capable of any further exhibition of strength that might be demanded of Him. That was not all. That, no doubt, was the supreme basis of their confidence—that God who had broken the yoke of Pharaoh, liberated them from his tyrant sway, and brought them through the Red Sea in safety, could

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do anything that had to be done. No doubt that was so, but their confidence did not merely rest on that. Beyond all that there was the consideration that the deliverance of the present was a part of one grand purpose completed already in the mind of God ; a purpose which had been indicated to them in the mission of Moses.

Moses had been commissioned not merely to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, but to take them into Canaan ; not only to rescue them from the iron furnace, but to conduct them to a land flowing with milk and honey ; and now, at the moment of the triumphant completion of one part of this grand purpose, they are in a position to conclude that He who has already fulfilled His own promises will not fail them in what remains ; and that He who has done what seemed to be by far the hardest part of the undertaking, will be competent to carry to a triumphant issue all that has yet to be done.

Yes, when we come to think it over, we must admit that it was the hardest part of the undertaking that had been already accomplished. If we had lived at that time, and if we had visited the Israelites in Egypt, and contemplated their condition under the tyrant sway of Pharaoh, we should have said that nothing was more improbable than that in a few weeks—or, indeed, in any time whatever—this nation of serfs should suddenly spring up into the enjoyment of national life and liberty, and be capable of throwing off the yoke of Pharaoh. We all know how soon slaves lose what little courage they may have possessed, and how incapable they are as a rule of rising up against their oppressors. Moreover in the present case the systematic destruction of the male children was robbing the nation slowly but surely of all masculine power, and thus with every year of their captivity their condition became more and more utterly helpless and hopeless.

Then, too, we should have been bound to take into account the power of Pharaoh ; remember he was the mightiest monarch of the period ; consider the forces at the command of this ancient monarchy, as witnessed by those colossal works that the Pharaohs have left behind. Thus, with the contrast between the power of Egypt with the impotence of Israel before our mind, let us reflect what event could have been more improbable than that the Israelites should ever be delivered from his control.

Or, again, if they were indeed to be delivered, who would

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ever have thought of such a deliverance. But, lo ! there they stand, not only delivered, but delivered without drawing a sword. They have simply had to stand still and see the salvation of God manifested on their behalf. And who could have expected so complete a deliverance? For not only are the people themselves set free, but their oppressors are destroyed, so that the Egyptians are no longer in a position to continue the pursuit into the wilderness, or to attempt to bring them back into bondage. They themselves had never dared to hope for such an emancipation, and had been slow in their despondency to respond to the advances of Moses and Aaron ; the prospect had seemed too discouraging ; and yet now the thing was done. The hosts of Pharaoh are buried in the depths of the Red Sea, while the ransomed of the Lord have crossed over in safety ; and as they stand on the other side, their hearts filled with joy at the triumphant delivery which God had just wrought for them, they draw the not unreasonable conclusion that if God can fulfil — and if God actually has fulfilled — this first portion of His divine purpose, He may be trusted to fulfil the rest. If He has done the greater thing, surely He can do that which, regarded from even a human point of view, was certainly less difficult. And so in the anticipations of their faith they saw it all done already.

Children of God, it is time we endeavoured to apply the lessons suggested by all this to ourselves. We too have been the subjects of a great deliverance, a deliverance as supernatural in its character and as astonishing in its conditions as ever was the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. This deliverance is also the product of redemption. We too have been redeemed from the judgment of God against our sin, and from the consequent tyranny of Satan, a more ruthless oppressor than even Pharaoh was. None would ever have thought of suggesting such means as have been employed for our redemption any more than they could have foreseen the circumstances of the Exodus ; and our deliverance from judgment and slavery is also part of one grand divine purpose, towards the accomplishment of which this is only the first step. We are saved in order that we may rise to the prize of our high calling, and become inheritors of our true Land of Promise ; and the first great deliverance is with us also surely an earnest and a pledge of all that is to follow.

I suppose it is because we so imperfectly apprehend the



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miracle of our deliverance and its completeness, and the new relations which it establishes between ourselves and God, and between ourselves and sin, that our feelings at the outset of our new life are so often just the opposite of those depicted in this triumphant song.

Instead of joyous anticipation, how common a thing it is to meet with gloomy forebodings on the part of the newborn children of God, fresh from the cross of Christ, just rising, as we may say, spiritually out of the waters of the Red Sea. And many of us have scarcely been saved from our position of condemnation and spiritual bondage before we begin to consider the difficulties that lie before us, the enemies that we shall have to encounter, the sacrifices that we may have to make, the trials that we may have to undergo. The wilderness seems so vast, the enemies so mighty, the supplies so inadequate or precarious; and while our eyes of unbelief are resting upon all these adverse considerations, our heart seems to sink within us until we are ready to turn back again into Egypt.

How common a thing it is to meet with young Christians who seem indeed to be on the right side of the Red Sea, but who appear to be more inclined to wring their hands in terror than to "sound the loud timbrel" in exultation! How shall I ever keep my religion when the mission is over? How shall I battle against the worldly influences by which I am surrounded? How shall I face my old friends, and stand firm against their efforts to seduce me from my new path in life? How shall I ever master my besetting sins? How can I hope to curb my temper? says one. How shall I master my lust? says another. How shall I overcome my sloth and indolence? says a third. How shall I rise above my moral cowardice? says a fourth.

And thus our anticipations of coming disaster take all the bloom off our early joy, and mar our triumph before it has well begun. And thus we pave the way for failure; for if we begin by doubting the God who has redeemed us, at the very outset of our Christian life, when the great fact of deliverance lies fresh before our view, how can we expect to trust Him better when the actual struggle has begun? and not to trust Him is to ensure necessary defeat and failure.

Now all this dismal apprehension, this cowardly misgiving, comes of our not sufficiently realizing what it is that is contained in redemption. We do not see that our justification is

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not only a fact of the present, but a pledge for the future. In fact, we treat the Atonement as if it were indeed what some have slanderously reported it to be—only a legal fiction, instead of an actual source of new and spiritual power. We judge of what lies before us as if we were to all practical intents and purposes the same persons that we were before, forgetting that “if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature: old things have passed away, and all things have become new. And all things are OF God.”

We forget that we have passed from nature into grace, and now we have to count upon divine resources. We forget that Christ is the *First* and the *Last*; that as He is the Alpha, so He is also the Omega, and that He is all the alphabet between the Alpha and Omega. There are some people who can believe in Christ for Alpha, and in Christ for Omega; they believe in Christ for conversion, and in Christ for the death-bed. He is to open your career, and close your career, and then you are to struggle on and do the best you can between these two points. But I believe the Alpha and the Omega is the Alpha and Omega of comprehension, and not of exclusion. The whole alphabet is contained within its two terms. As He begins so He goes on, and as He goes on so He concludes; and as you stand upon the banks of the Red Sea it is your privilege not only to see that He has drowned the hosts of Pharaoh, but that He has conquered Canaan. He has not only delivered us from Egypt, but He has, in a certain sense, brought us into the Land of Promise, although we have not yet set our foot on that Land of Promise, or realized the blessedness God intends us to enjoy.

What do our doubts and fears and misgivings come from? Surely it is easy to see that they come from our looking away from the deliverance; just as the joyful anticipation of Miriam and Moses came from their looking back on the deliverance, and allowing themselves to be adequately impressed with its solemn grandeur. They had their eyes full of God, the glory of God, the power of God, the wisdom of God, the love of God, the faithfulness of God, the care of God. Their minds were taken up with God, and contemplating Him in the wonder of His work they looked back with feelings of triumph, and forward with confident anticipation. They did not stop to consider the difficulties and dangers of their task; they saw the whole thing already done,

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although it was yet to do ; and, in the language of faith, they represented themselves as already ascending up to God's appointed place, and offering their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, while the Shechina blazed forth in all its glory, and filled the house with the Divine Presence.

They foresaw it all as theirs already ; and even so may you, dear children of God, if you are saved outright. There are some Christians who seem to me to stick in the Red Sea. They don't get right through and on to firm ground on the other side. Or if they do get through at last, it is not till the waters have begun to return ; and when they are pulled ashore with friendly violence, they look more like shipwrecked mariners who have been half-drowned than the triumphant hosts of the Lord. But when a man is saved outright, he has a clear idea of redemption. He sees his enemies drowned in the Red Sea, and himself liberated by Omnipotence. When a man sees this to have been his experience, then he can afford to contemplate God with adoring confidence ; and while his soul is full of God, the difficulties, the opposition he has to encounter, and all the foes he has to overcome, dwindle down into comparative insignificance. He has learnt the lesson, and I want you, dear friends, to learn it also, that *in one great gift God gives us all*. I don't mean to say we realize it all ; I don't say we experience it all ; but I do say that God gives us all.

I have sometimes compared the gift of God to us in redemption to a property that contains concealed and unknown wealth. A man pays a hundred thousand pounds for a fine estate in Scotland. He surveys it, and says it is cheap at the money. What grand scenery ! what splendid grouse-moors ! what a fine river for my salmon ! It is a magnificent bargain. But he does not yet know how rich he is. As he is going up the mountain side one day his stick strikes against a rock ; he turns around and looks at it ; he picks it up and finds it is iron-stone. He thrusts his stick into the ground, and says, "There is iron here ; I will have a civil engineer to look at the place." He gets a mine surveyor on to his premises, and by-and-by, after a careful examination has been made, the inspector returns in high spirits "My dear sir, your fortune is made. That mountain is very nearly solid iron."

Just such a gratifying discovery as this was made not so long ago up in the North of England. A shrewd man of

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business at Middlesborough bought a mountain, which turned out to be pretty nearly so much solid iron, and he became an enormously wealthy millionaire. My dear friends, we don't know how rich we are, because we have not thrust our staffs beneath the surface yet. The man who bought the estate bought what was in the estate, and so when we appropriate redemption we take with it all that is treasured in that redemption. It is all ours, and faith claims it as our own. And by-and-by as the opportunity occurs, and as our spiritual life developes, so we shall find out the wealth that is treasured in that first great gift that God has given, and that which faith anticipates becomes that which experience makes proof of.

Now observe that redemption affects other people besides the happy Israelites. "All the people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. The dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased." What shall make these mighty men melt away? Seeing two or three millions of unwarlike folks marching towards them—an unarmed rabble, without military discipline, and without the appliances of war? Is it before such that the mighty men of Moab are to fall back, that the chivalrous sons of Edom are to be put to flight; that all the inhabitants of Palestine are to melt away? Nothing of the kind. Those Israelites were not going to terrify all these nations—these settled and well-provided nations whom they were so soon to meet face to face in battle—with any display of their own power or prowess.

It was the story of the Exodus, the story of a divided sea, the story of a certain mysterious pillar of fire, which showed the way to the Israelites, while it shed a hellish darkness upon the Egyptians; the story of the wonderful overthrow of Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea; it was this that was to fill them with despair. As the story of all this reached their hearts, their courage would fail them, their power of defence become paralyzed, and they would become prepared for the defeat that was to follow.

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My dear friends, many of us are at the outset terribly afraid of these hostile forces; is it not a comfort to know that on account of redemption they are actually afraid of us. There is Edom. Esau was a man of the world, and his descendants, the Edomites, are possibly the typical representatives of the spirit and power of the world. The world is very strong, and it is with it that many young Christians have their severest struggles in the early days of their new life. Not a few young Christians feel that, but for the world's power against them, it would be an easy thing to be a Christian; but the world is strong and cruel, and they tremble as they think of what the hostility of the world will be. Well listen: "The dukes of Edom shall be amazed . . . fear and dread shall be upon them." Children of God, if you are really His, take it for granted that the world is more afraid of you than you are of the world. And you had better count upon their fears instead of being afraid of them.

In a very memorable period in "our island story," when Admiral Howard and Drake had defeated the Spanish Armada after the first great battle, they continued to pursue them for a fortnight without having a single shot or a single charge of powder left in their ships. They had nothing left but air to fill their guns with. Yet thus without any ammunition our fleet went sailing on and sailing on, while the terrified strangers fled before them, until they were driven right into the Northern Sea. Then the Admiral thought they could not do much harm there, and so he left them and came back to get powder and shot for his own ships. Our fleet with empty guns chased their enemies because that enemy was afraid of them. They had had one terrible defeat, and that was enough.

And even so may we deal with the forces of this world. Count upon your enemies being afraid of you. If instead of being afraid of them you will only carry the war into the enemy's camp, and seek to win them for Christ, instead of allowing them to draw you away from Him, you will find that redemption has already stripped them of their courage, and paralysed their power to do you any injury. Christ has told us: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." How did He overcome the world? By the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ was the means whereby the world received its death-blow. He says,



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just before His crucifixion, "Now is the judgment of this world; now is the prince of this world cast out." And so the Apostle exclaims, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ"—whereby the world "is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." You are not of the world, even as He who redeemed you is not of the world. You belong to Him who has made you citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Surely you may trust Him to keep His own, and to show that heaven is stronger than earth! Remember what St. John teaches us: "Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world," and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

But there are other enemies mentioned here: "The mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them." The Moabites, sprung from the incestuous daughters of Lot, may serve to typify the lusts of the flesh, as Edom typifies the power of the world. A very subtle and dangerous enemy threatens us here, and one that in some one or other of the many forms it assumes is even more difficult to deal with than the world; but from that also remember that redemption saves us. From the power of flesh in every form Jesus Christ has redeemed us, because our old carnal man has been crucified together with Christ upon yonder cross that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." Thus by virtue of redemption Moab is already trembling. You are more than a match for your lower nature, my friends, if God dwells in your nature. You need not fear your own bodies if they are the temples of the Holy Ghost.

Then there are the inhabitants of Canaan—all the old forces of evil which have formed habits of evil within our nature, contributing each an element, so to speak, to perfect the old Adam within—the sloth, the pride, the vainglory, the anger and malice, the secret things of darkness, the untruthfulness, the dishonesty, the self-seeking, the self-pleasing, the love of pleasure rather than the love of God; all these old inhabitants (some of them veritable sons of Anak) are already foredoomed if you are redeemed from all iniquity, and are purchased to be to the Lord a people of possession. Be not afraid of your indwelling foes; their defence has departed; the Canaanites share the common panic. You are redeemed as fully from

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those evil propensities as you are from the authority of the world. It is your blessed privilege to see your old Adam crucified together with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed that you should not henceforth serve sin; it is your privilege so to appropriate the benefits of the cross as to mortify your members which are upon the earth, and by the Spirit so to pursue to death the deeds of the body that you may truly live. (Rom. viii. 13.) By faith in redemption we are to put off the old man with his deceitful lusts, and put on the new, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. The provision for this marvellous transformation is, you see, already made, and the old inhabitants of the land may well tremble; for He who has begun the good work in us may be trusted to carry it on until its triumphant issue.

Thus we may look right on, like the Israelites, until we find ourselves contemplating the crowning glory of all. These Israelites, standing on the shores of the Red Sea, seemed already to see the magnificent form of the stately temple rising in all its splendour, and themselves assembled to pour out their adoring worship before a revealed God. Even so with us, dear friends, at the very moment of our deliverance from the spiritual Egypt, it is our privilege in faith and hope to look right on into the heavenly places whither Jesus our Fore-runner is for us entered, and to anticipate with joy unspeakable our introduction into that inner sanctuary, that presence-chamber of God, where, with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we shall cast ourselves prostrate before the throne, and pour out our adoring praise unto Him who has loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God, even the Father, for ever and for ever.

Blessed be God, it is a complete redemption, and the more we dwell upon its completeness the stronger we shall feel, and the more calm our lives will be. The glory of true Christian experience is this—I have already said it, and I will say it again, because I want to print it upon your minds—that in one great gift God has given us all, and it only now remains for us to work out that wondrous gift into all the fullness of practical wealth which actually is contained within it. There is no reason then, dear Christian friends, for gloomy forebodings, for unbelieving fears. Tremble not, you who are just starting forth on the new life, for your foes are already

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trembling; but they may cease to tremble if they see you begin. The unbelief that grieves and disappoints your God weakens you and renews their strength: to fear is to create good cause for fear. Pluck up a good courage, and commit yourself fearlessly to your heavenly Guide, and then in God's name go forward where He leads, following the pillar of cloud and fire with the shout of jubilant confidence—"Arise, O God, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee."

And if you find it difficult to rise above your fears, then let me urge you to do what Miriam and her followers did. Go forth and contemplate again the wondrous deliverance. Think of what is meant by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and your death and resurrection in Him, and then begin to sing—sing with heart, aye, and voice too, as they sang then. Give way to the spirit of praise which He has breathed into you to take the place of the spirit of heaviness; out of the mouths of you who are still spiritually babes and sucklings let Him perfect praise, that He may still the enemy and the avenger.

Ah! methinks many of us never get a fair start, just because at first we praise so little. I like to see children childlike, merry, bright, frolicsome, sunny; it annoys me when I see a child demure, artificial, and terribly proper. And spiritual childhood should display its own proper characteristics, and one of these David knew, and spake a good deal about—"He hath put a new song into my mouth, even a thanksgiving to our God." Yes; thank Him not only for the past, but for the future, for all the faithfulness and truth which are yet to be exhibited, but which already exist in the heart of God for you. Do you remember a very instructive verse in one of our hymns—

"And a new song is in my mouth,  
To long-loved music set—  
Glory to God for all the grace  
I have not tasted yet"!

That's the right note; keep to it, and in this spirit face the desert without murmuring, and the foe without fear, and you will always find something to sing about in the present as well as in the past and the future.

Oh that these singers had kept up their music a little longer!

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Alas! too soon they changed their jubilant songs for a mournful and discordant wail of murmuring at Marah, and there their music got into a melancholy minor key, from which it hardly ever afterwards seemed able to make its escape during all their long years of wanderings. But of this I shall speak in my next sermon, pointing out the warning that their sorrowful story suggests.

To-day I would fain send you away singing, Victory, victory, through the blood of the Lamb! "Sing ye to the Lord; for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He cast into the sea." I would have you go forth conscious more than ever before of your own weakness, but confident in divine power. The Lord hath done great things for us already, whereof we rejoice, and "'tis better on before." Fear not for the morrow. Has not the Master taught us to "take no anxious thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof"? We can clearly see from these words of His that He intended us to trust Him for the outward necessities of life. Are we any less bound to trust Him for the supply of our spiritual necessities? "Tiny snoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy day, so shall thy strength be." What do we want more than this?

Trials lie before you, perplexities, conflicts — of course they do. If you were not to be subjected to this friendly discipline, you might as well be taken to heaven at once; but is this all, or only part of the truth? Does not "grace to help in every time of need" lie before you too? Wisdom given bountifully and without upbraiding, and "victory through Jesus Christ our Lord," are not these also elements in your prospect of the future? And "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," is not that something to count upon? Surely you "may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man doeth unto me."

Take your timbrel in your hand, and join the exultant chorus. Sing even now the song of Moses and of the Lamb. Sing as the soldiers of Jehoshaphat sung in the valley of Barachah *before* the battle. Shout for victory as the expectant multitude shouted *before* the walls of Jericho fell down. The Lord will never allow you to be the victims of great expectations, so far as He is concerned; rather shall you ever find that your expectations have come short of His gracious intentions

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concerning you ; and by-and-by, when the march through the desert is ended, the song of anticipation shall become the song of celebration : "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire : and them that had gotten the victory . . . stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

"Thou dost conduct Thy people  
Through torrents of temptation :  
Nor will we fear  
While Thou art near  
The fire of tribulation.  
The world with sin and Satan  
In vain our march opposes ;  
By Thee we shall  
Break through them all,  
And sing the song of Moses.

"By faith we see the glory  
To which Thou shalt restore us.  
The world despise  
For that high prize  
Which Thou hast set before us.  
And if Thou count us worthy,  
We each, with dying Stephen,  
Shall see Thee stand  
At God's right hand  
To call us up to heaven."



## The Disappointments of Unbelief.

"Wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink."—*Numbers* xx. 5.

WHAT a contrast between the joyous outburst of triumphant anticipation that sounded forth, as we saw in our last sermon, on the shore of the Red Sea, and these mournful utterances of bitter disappointment and cruel mortification! There are no "loud timbrels" now, no voice of joyful song, no dances of the virgins of Israel, no antiphonal responses of enthusiastic warriors. The only music now is the mournful wail of regret; the only refrain the repining murmurs of mingled despondency and resentment.

As if to give point to the contrast, this chapter commences with the mention of the death of that sweet singer who had led the damsels of Israel in their songs and dances on the shore of the Red Sea long years before. Miriam the prophetess had passed away without ever realizing the triumphant anticipations that had filled her "prophetic soul," without ever setting foot in the land of promise; and her brother Aaron was soon to follow her. The story of his death ends the chapter which opens with the mention of the death of his sister.

Further, the very place where these sad and impatient utterances were once again sounding forth was a place of evil memories and mournful associations. Here it was, some thirty-seven years before, the congregation had awaited with eager expectation the return of the spies; here it was that they might have entered at once on their work of conquest and acquisition; and here it was that unbelief had triumphed over faith, and shut them out of the promised heritage. If there was one place more than another that it must have cost the Israelites pain and humiliation to revisit, that place was Kadesh Barnea.

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And between these two contrasted scenes—the moment of joyous enthusiasm and of triumphant anticipation in the past, and the moment of deepest depression and disappointment in the present—well-nigh forty long, weary, tedious years of apparently aimless and fruitless wandering, and a dreary story of rebellion, and wilfulness, and disobedience running through them all, relieved only now and then by the record of some wondrous revelation of divine mercy, or some astonishing display of divine power.

What shall we say? Was the expectation really too confident? Had God really disappointed them? Was He to blame for that they had proved, not His promise, but His “breach of promise”? Let us pass over a few years, and ask the now hoary-headed Joshua, ere yet he passes away, whether they expected too much when they indulged in such confident anticipations. Listen to his words; they are a dying man’s testimony: “And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof. . . . And God hath given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.” With such a testimony sounding in our ears, we have not much difficulty in answering these questions. The Israelites were indeed disappointed, but *the disappointment was self-caused*.

But now it is time we should turn from them to those whom they represent only too faithfully—the Christian men and women who begin by “running well,” and then who seem to fall under the blight of a similar disappointment. Alas! how many do we meet with who confess in sorrowful and sometimes in petulant language that their whole lives, after the first few weeks of their Christian experience, have been miserable failures. Certainly such Christians do not adorn the doctrine of Christ, but rather disfigure it, by the witness of their lives. Judged by the experiences and admissions of these professors, Christianity itself might well be regarded as weighed in the balances and found wanting. What is the use of a religion which leaves its votaries in no better condition, morally speaking, than they were without it—a religion that does not satisfy their legitimate aspirations, nor answer the proper purposes of religion? What

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profit is there in a religion that seems to bring no more enjoyment of God, no more spiritual happiness, no more moral power, no more capacity for usefulness, than if we possessed none at all? Is Christianity itself a failure? Is the Christian's hope foredoomed to disappointment?

These questions are the more easily answered because there are some, thank God, with whom, as with Joshua of old, the case is quite otherwise. There are some, even amongst ourselves, who speak of their own experience of the fulness of the blessing of the gospel with as much of grateful satisfaction as the good spies displayed in giving their testimony to the land of promise. There are some who, so far as they have gone in their career of victory and acquisition, are able to say, as we have seen that Joshua said at the close of his wonderful life, "Not one thing hath failed us of all the good things which the Lord our God spake concerning us." And this shows that the fault does not lie with Christianity, nor with the God from whom our holy faith has proceeded. We are not straitened in Him, but in ourselves; with us, as with the Israelites, our failures and disappointments are self-caused—they are the product of our own wilfulness and unbelief.

Now in attempting to gather the lessons of this sorrowful story of anticipation never fulfilled, and of hopes doomed to disappointment, let us begin by considering what was God's purpose in bringing His people into the wilderness, and in keeping them there for a season; for it is just as clear that it was the will of God that they should tarry there for a time, as that it was not the will of God that they should spend their lives, as most of them actually did, in wandering aimlessly from place to place in these barren and desolate regions. The passage through the wilderness, and the exposure of the children of Israel to these peculiar conditions of trial, was all part of God's gracious plan concerning them; and from this we may learn to explain much that would otherwise be perplexing in the early experiences of young Christians, who, like their Master, after the first great blessing, find themselves led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

We are taught something about these purposes of God long after the event, when Moses was reviewing the marvellous history in the book of Deuteronomy; and here I would remark in passing, that it is always very much easier to see the reason of things when we look back than when we either look for-

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wards to, or are actually in the midst of, the circumstances that need to be explained. And this should teach us patience, and dispose us to trust in the superior wisdom of the "Divinity who shapes our ends rough hew them how we may." How different all the circumstances and conditions of life will seem when we come to look back upon them by-and-by in the clear light of Eternity, from the appearance that they bear now. Still the Master has to say to us, as He said to His too self-confident disciple of old, "That which I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." And we have to learn to say with David, "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known; but thou ledest thy people like a flock, by the hand of" a Greater than "Moses and Aaron."

Well, here then is Moses' statement of the purposes of the sojourn in the wilderness. You will find it in Deut. viii. 2, 3 : "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

Here the first great object of the sojourn in the wilderness is described in the words, "to humble thee." Yes, Israel needed to be humbled, although it might have been supposed that boasting would have been excluded by the very character and circumstances of their deliverance, and the helplessness of their condition as they started on their wilderness journey. They had done nothing to compass their own salvation; they had performed no single deed of prowess. Their own reason told them that they were utterly helpless and dependent. Yet so subtle a thing is pride, that it creeps in even where you would think there was nothing to encourage it, it finds an argument in the very effects of free and unmerited grace; and it feeds on that divine bounty which you might have thought would have been most unpalatable to it.

But yesterday these Israelites were slaves, now they were free men; yesterday they were without any national existence, now they are a promising and powerful commonwealth; yes-

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terday they were a herd of panic-stricken fugitives, and now they are the wonder and the terror of all beholders. It is easy to see how a form of pride, not less perilous because it was unreasonable, might spring out of the very thought of the contrast thus presented between the past and the present; and had they been led straight into Canaan, and launched upon a career of conquest in which they themselves should have borne a part, who shall say to what an extent this pride of heart might have been developed, and how disastrous an effect it might have induced upon their subsequent history? They must learn in experience what they already know in theory, that they are in themselves just as helpless now as when they were slaves in Egypt, and they can best be taught this by a sojourn in the great and terrible wilderness, where they are necessarily dependent upon God for everything.

Is it not just so with us? The conditions of justification have been so ordered of God as that boasting shall be excluded. "We have sold ourselves for naught, and we have been redeemed without money;" yet even out of this humiliating process pride will seek to gather food for itself; and if we were to become at once possessed in conscious enjoyment of all that is by redemption ours, who shall say how high our vanity might rise? So we have to learn in our own experience our own utter helplessness and incapacity before the Lord can use us, and make us mighty to pull down the strongholds of evil without and within. We have to learn that we, in ourselves, apart from divine grace and the indwelling Christ, are just what we were before our conversion, as impotent and worthless as ever. Nothing but the presence of His grace within and the provisions of His care without make us to differ from those who still are slaves. The new life that we live we only live by faith in Him. And we learn this lesson best in the wilderness, which is, as I may say, the elementary school of Christ, where certain primary lessons have to be learned ere we can proceed to "go on to perfection."

The Wilderness, lying as it did between Egypt and Canaan, would seem to represent in type those earlier and intermediate conditions of spiritual experience, in which the justified soul begins to find out how much it has lost by turning the back upon the world and sin, ere yet it begins to apprehend, with any degree of fulness, how much it has gained in Christ. It is that condition in which negation seems to



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preponderate over acquisition, and longing, yearning desire to be much more common than any sense of inward gratification. "Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them." It is that condition of experience in which we are almost overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness and need, while we have only very imperfectly begun to apprehend the completeness of the divine supply. It is that condition of experience in which all seems changeful and unsettled—a Marah to-day, an Elim to-morrow; quails in abundance at one time, not even a drop of water at another. I dare say many of you know what I mean; you are familiar perhaps in your own spiritual life with such strange vicissitudes between satisfaction and want, enjoyment and depression. It is that condition of experience in which we are peculiarly disposed to think a great deal of our feelings, and often seem to find very few pleasant feelings to think about. The fruits of the Spirit may be in course of production, but we do not seem to find many indications of their presence; we seem rather to sow in tears than to reap in joy. It is that condition of experience in which our hearts are ready to faint within us at the thought of all the difficulties and dangers of the way, and in which we seem to be rescued, and supported, and helped through by a series of Divine interventions, manifested in response to the cry of our anguish—I had almost said our despair—rather than by any fixed law of the Divine operation with which our faith has become acquainted.

Look at Joshua struggling with the Amalekites, and then look at the same Joshua triumphing over the four kings, and you will see the full force of the contrast between wilderness experiences and the life in the Land of Fulfilled Promises. In the one case you see Amalek commencing the attack, and then follows a terrible conflict, the tide of battle flowing now one way, and now the other, until a looker-on might have regarded the issue as most uncertain. You see upon the mountain-top Moses supported by his two friends in an agony of prayer, and only by this mighty effort of supplication is the victory at last obtained. And even when it is obtained it leaves Amalek still strong; the work of crushing him is not completed till centuries later.

In the other case you see the allied forces of the foe boldly attacked by the confident Israelites, no thought of defeat, even for a moment, crossing their minds. We contemplate the night march, the onslaught in the early dawn of morning, the panic

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of the vast host, the promiscuous flight, the prolonged pursuit, the shower of deadly hailstones, the challenge of Joshua to sun and moon, the slaughter of the kings, the occupation of their cities. This is the sort of warfare that one expects from the hosts of the Lord, but they were not fit for such experiences when first they left Egypt. No, they had to be humbled first, and we have to learn this lesson too. Let us thank God for conflicts that show us how weak we are, and wilderness experiences which show us how utterly dependent we are for everything.

The next object of the life in the wilderness may be described as the establishment of law. In the history of other communities, the local habitation is first occupied, and then the political constitution begins to take shape, and not till then does the national law gradually begin to develop itself. But when God undertakes to prepare a nation for Himself, He gives them a law before He gives them a home, so that when they enter upon their heritage they may be prepared to hold it as for Him and to keep it undefiled. And they must not only have a law given, but they must be tested as to their willingness to obey. They must, at any rate, learn to assume the attitude of obedience before they can be trusted in Canaan.

So Moses goes on to say in this passage that this wilderness experience was permitted "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no." Alas! how little did these triumphant singers know what was in their heart! If some one had dared to prophecy to them, Before many hours have gone you will all be murmuring at Marah; in a few weeks you will be wishing yourselves back in Egypt at Rephidim; in some four months you will be worshipping a calf in Horeb, and bowing before a graven image; in less than a year you will be threatening to stone those who dare to say that these present triumphant anticipations of yours may then and there be fulfilled, and that Israel is able to take possession of the promised land—who would have listened for a moment to such a prophet of ills? Yet all this was in their hearts, though they knew it not; and who shall say what is in ours?

One thing is certain, if the law of God is not graven there, the law of self-will is; and how needful then it is, ere we enter upon the enjoyments of our Canaan, that we should be brought

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face to face with the claims of God upon our obedience, and the question, Are we going to accept His will as the new law within, or are we going to assert our own? It is true that we have to do with the perfect law of liberty, and that this has to be written within, not exhibited as engraven on a table of stone without; still, the regal claims of Christ upon our hearts and lives have to be pressed upon our recognition, and we have to be tested as to whether we are ready to submit and to obey; for until we have learnt what the new love-law is, and until something like an attitude of obedience is honestly assumed, our very Canaan would be in danger of becoming a Babylon to us, and our very religion the parent of a little Antichrist.

Obedience—the habit of obedience, that is to say—can of course be fully learned only in a lifetime; it is a lesson that we are ever to go on learning; it is a lesson that Jesus Christ in His Manhood had to learn; but it is something, and indeed it is no small matter, to have abandoned the attitude of defiance or the habit of resistance, and to have made a full submission of ourselves to God. We are then in a position to be trained in obedience, and to learn how to fulfil His good pleasure; but until this full surrender is honestly made, the habit of obedience can never be formed.

3 The third object of the wilderness life specified by Moses in this passage was the inculcation of faith. This was the great positive lesson that they had to learn, as humility was the negative. They were not only to become practically convinced of their own weakness and insufficiency, but also to be fully persuaded of His power and of the boundless extent of God's resources. They were to learn that "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Their raiment was not to wax old, nor their foot to swell; they were to drink water out of the stony rock, or to dig wells with their staves in the burning sand; they were to fight battles by prayer, and to take journeys guided by a pillar of cloud; and thus, in all the details of their daily life, they were to be educated and trained to trust.

And such is the lesson that we too have to learn ere we can rise to the true level of our Christian privileges. It is not enough to be unclothed; we need to be clothed upon. Not enough that we should be humbled and stripped of all kind of confidence in ourselves. We need not only to be justified by faith, but to live by the faith of the justified. We have to learn

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by experience the great lesson of trust; and instead of depending upon anything external, or even upon spiritual experiences, we have to learn to live "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." To move forward with a divine uncarefulness, trusting the future, as the past, to an unchanging love; to face dangers without fear, and difficulties without misgiving; to march without asking where, and expect supplies without asking whence—this is to show that we have learnt the great lesson that wilderness experiences are specially designed to teach.

Humility, obedience, faith—these are to Christian experience what the famous "three R's" are to modern elementary education. We need to be well grounded in these before we can go on to enjoy the Christian's Canaan—the land of fulfilled promise. And as these same "three R's" are seldom learned without tears, so these fundamental lessons of the wilderness are not for the most part learned without the application of more or less of that gentle, fatherly discipline, without which we might believe ourselves to be bastards, and not sons. So Moses goes on to remind his hearers that "as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." The wilderness is not a pleasant place even to pass through, much less to dwell in, and the conditions of existence in such a place are sufficiently trying, but these elementary lessons are more readily learnt there than elsewhere; for the wilderness itself, with all its terrible and depressing features, seems to thrust the necessity of learning them upon our hearts.

We see then that the wilderness had its uses, although these murmurers were doubtless right in describing it as a very undesirable place, and very different from the land flowing with milk and honey which they had looked forward to; but let us ask, How came these Israelites to make such a bad use of that place of trial; how had it become to them a vast prison—a convict's territory, instead of a school and training ground?

We must go back a long way for the answer. The joyful anthems of praise on the shore of the Red Sea had hardly died away when the first false keynote was sounded, from which we may say all the miserable discords of the future were to flow in mournful cadences. They came to Marah, and they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" Oh, why did they murmur? Had

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they already forgotten the miracle of their deliverance? Why didn't they trust instead of murmuring? and then the first trial might have proved, as it was doubtless intended to be, a first victory. But, alas! their confidence in God seems to have been very short-lived, and soon to have given place to a rooted mistrust, which remained, ever ready to break out in fresh murmurings and repinings at each new trial.

Thus we see how they contrived by their petulance and unbelief (to use the startling and terrible words of the prophet Malachi) to curse their blessings. Each fresh intervention of divine love and power on their behalf, instead of drawing them nearer to the Lord, seems to produce a fresh estrangement. They murmured at Marah, and the Lord by miracle made the bitter water sweet; but the bitter taste of their own murmuring spirit remained long after the waters had been healed. They murmured for food in the wilderness of Sin, and the Lord sent them Manna; but the voice of solemn warning against their untoward ways sounded even more sternly than before, while they were informed of the provision that God was about to make. They gained the outward good, but they lost the inward blessing.

They murmured at Rephidim, and the Lord sent them water by miracle; but their souls were unrefreshed, and the poisonous thought still clung to their hearts, Is the Lord among us or not? They murmured at the absence of Moses in the mount, and supplemented their murmurings by gross idolatry and licentiousness; and thus the very blessing of a divinely-given law was turned into a curse. They murmured at Taberah, and there no blessing came of it at all, not even an outward one, but only a desolating fire. They murmured at Kibroth-Hattaavah, and God sent them the quails that they lusted after; but "while the flesh was yet between their teeth, the wrath of God was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague;" and the tragic story of that blessing closes with the mournful words, "There they buried them that lusted."

So they went on murmuring and repining, tempting and provoking God, and causing Him to curse their blessings, until at last the crowning blessing, already within their reach, brought upon them the crowning curse. They were already within easy distance of Canaan, and the long-promised inheritance lay before them, when the spies were despatched



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from Kadesh-Barnea. For forty days the people waited while the spies examined the land, as they had waited once before forty days for the appearance of Moses with the law. In both cases alike, this precious waiting-time, which might indeed have been a season of preparation for the full enjoyment of coming blessings, seems to have been turned to a bad use. It seems to have induced a feeling of petulance and impatience, instead of a spirit of calm and reverent hope; and when the days were ended they were ripe for mischief.

Then the moment arrived which was the crisis in their history. The spies returned to the expectant multitude, bringing with them glowing accounts of the fertility and wealth of that favoured land, and proving their description true by the exhibition of the grapes of Eshcol and the other produce that they brought with them. But, unhappily, their testimony did not end there. They went on to give exaggerated accounts of the strength of the inhabitants of the land, until they succeeded in persuading the people that the enterprise in which they were about to engage was utterly chimerical, and could only end in disaster and destruction. Vainly did Joshua and Caleb attempt to still the people before the Lord. The long-smouldering discontent, kindled by earlier acts of unbelief, broke forth at last into a general flame—a conflagration that consumed all their hopes, and left them, homeless and comfortless, to wander in the weary waste of desert.

How difficult it is to believe that these angry and blaspheming malcontents at Kadesh-Barnea are the very same people as those who sang that song of jubilant anticipation on the shores of the Red Sea. What a contrast between the imagery of that triumphant song and the coward fears which wearied out at last the long-suffering patience of God! Listen to their impious murmurings, that we may learn how far blind unbelief will go in dishonouring the power and denying the love of God. “Because the Lord hated us, He hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us.” “Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!” “Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.” And no wonder that God took them at their word, and sware in His wrath that they should never enter into His promised rest.

And now well-nigh forty long years have rolled away, and

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they seem no nearer Canaan than ever. Once more they are in Kadesh, and once more they are engaged in their congenial occupation of murmuring; and there seems to be more of settled bitterness in their words now than of passion. They tell of prolonged disappointment, of rebellion that has become chronic, and discontent that may almost be described as the normal state of things; and yet a feeling of pity mingles with our censure as we listen to their petulant wail. Alas! there was too much truth in their words, "And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us unto *this evil* place? this is no place of seed, or of vines, or figs, or pomegranates." And certainly they were right—it *was* an evil place, but whose fault was it that they were still there? Was it God's purpose that kept them there, or their own unbelief?

Let us leave them and turn to ourselves. How many Christians do we meet with now, who, to judge from their own confessions and admissions, seem, like the Israelites of old, shut out of the Land of Promise? Their religious experience has proved one long disappointment. They set out once with bright prospects and fair hopes, and for a time they did run well; but all is altered now. Their first days were their best days; they have lost rather than gained as time has worn on; and now it would almost be difficult to say what advantage they derive from their religion, unless it be a vague and distant hope of heaven at last, that has not been wholly forfeited.

If we were to form our ideas of the Christian life from what we see in such, we should probably conclude that it is indeed into an evil place that the grace of God introduces those who become the recipients of it. The man of the world, like the Israelite in Egypt, has some pleasure and gratification in life. There are carnal pleasures, which, although they may seem beneath the true dignity of our nature, yet do yield a certain amount of mere animal enjoyment. There are social and domestic pleasures, and the distractions of a worldly life, which, if they do not minister any very deep and lasting satisfaction, at any rate divert the mind from melancholy reflections. Or, again, there are intellectual resources open to some, which come nearer to furnishing the desired happiness than anything else that earth can offer; although here too men fail to find what they really need, and often have to endorse the verdict of the wise man, "In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Still it must

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be conceded that they who have their portion in this life do gain something, can point to some sort of acquisition, whether valuable or otherwise. Egypt has its flesh-pots, if it has also its iron furnace.

On the other hand, they who follow the Lord fully, like Joshua and Caleb, find a wealthy possession in the Land of Fulfilled Promises. "The lot has fallen" to them "in pleasant places, and they have a goodly heritage." "The Lord Himself is the portion of His people," and they can testify that "the land does indeed flow with milk and honey." But while the worldling has something to show for his choice, and they who follow the Lord fully have much to say for theirs, what can be said for the Christian who forfeits the good things of Egypt, and yet never sets a foot in Canaan; the Christian who has too much religion to be able to enjoy the world, and too little religion to be able to enjoy God?

What can such an one say of his experience but that he dwells in an evil place? it is no place of seed, or vines, or figs, neither is there water that we may drink. You had thought, my dear friend, that your Christian career would have been very different from what it has proved. You expected joy, and peace, and power, and progress, and usefulness, and victory; and you can only point at rare intervals to an occasional Elim or Beer. Instead of peace there is the murmur of disappointment and the darkling doubt, "Is the Lord among us or not?" And though here and there you may have emerged successful from a terrible fray with some ruthless Amalek that has threatened to extinguish the spiritual life within altogether, or with some troublesome Arad, still your attempts at self-conquest have proved abortive; the Amorites have chased you from their hill, and you have well-nigh given up the hope of moral victory over all that defiles and desecrates your being.

Progress!—Ah! it seems to you as if you had gone backwards instead of forwards, and mournful reminiscences crowd into your memory as you pitch in your Kadesh-Barnea and think of the faded promise of the past. Who shall blame you if you speak sorrowfully—yes, even bitterly—of your disappointments? and who can wonder if a cold and cruel scepticism steals over your heart as to the reality of the blessing that you seem doomed not to enjoy? Is this Canaan, after all, anything more than a sentimental dream? this land of promise, is it anything but a mirage of the desert? And those who profess better things,

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may they not after all be either deceivers or self-deceived garrulous talkers who wish to pass for saints, sentimental visionaries, whose fervid imagination supplies them whatever experience they desire?

Stay, my dear friend, lest haply you make God a liar, and rather ask yourself, Is there not a cause? May it not be with you as with these Israelites, of whom it is written, "So we see that they could not enter in because of their unbelief"? In the early days of your Christian life you too were led into the wilderness. That is to say, so far as I understand the figure, you passed into a phase of experience in which you were conscious of having parted company with the old without having grasped the fulness of blessing that there is in the new. While in this transition state God began to deal with you in His own wise way. He gave you a Marah with its bitter waters, a loss of sensible comfort, a season of spiritual depression. Did you begin to think hard thoughts of Him, and emulate the murmurings of the Israelites? Your lot was cast for a season in a dry place, you had but few spiritual privileges. Did you repeat the murmurings of Rephidim so that even that season of refreshment that followed, when the water flowed from the stricken rock, left you with the baleful suspicion rankling in your heart, "Is the Lord amongst us or not?"

You complained that you had to hear a tedious preacher, sadly wanting in power and eloquence, and the services were dull and heavy. You had the Manna provided for you in the Sacramental Feast, in the Word, and in prayer, but you wanted something better than "this light food." You thought of the burning eloquence of the Evangelist from whose lips you first received the gospel message in power, and of all the exciting and spirit-stirring influences of that day of visitation. You were lusting for your quails, and you got them. You found yourself, to your great satisfaction, attached to the congregation of that popular preacher, whose impressive manner and freshness of thought seemed just what you wanted. Yes; it was the old story—"He gave them flesh at their desire, and sent leanness withal into their souls." You may be thankful you are not buried in the graves of man-lust, as I fear too many popular preacher-worshippers are.

Meanwhile what about the great lessons of the wilderness? Have you been so long time at school and yet made but little way, even with our "three R's" that I spoke of just now—

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humility, obedience, faith? Surely it is no wonder then that you cannot master the sons of Anak, or enter into the promised rest that even here belongs to the people of God! "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and *are become*" (just as if they had grown backwards into second childhood) "such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe." It is not by unskilful babes that Canaan is to be won, but by those who are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." If we are slow to learn these primary lessons we must remain in that elementary school—the wilderness; nay, we may even sink to the dunce's form; and no wonder then that we are disposed to complain that this is an "evil place."

Nay, is it so, that the worst is still to follow? Where you failed to learn the A B C of humility, obedience, faith, did you learn unawares from another teacher, who is always skulking about the school premises, those counter lessons which he loves to teach, and which are with such difficulty unlearned—pride, self-will, unbelief, the first letters of Satan's alphabet, and the first principles of the Law of Darkness, as the other trio may be called first principles of the Law of Light? Was this the fatal lore that you acquired? And has it brought forth its deadly fruit?

When the claims of God upon you—revealed in the life and teaching of Christ—have appealed to your inner sensibilities, when your theoretic knowledge of God's purposes concerning you has advanced, like the spies, into your Land of Promise, and your desires have been stirred and stimulated by all that you have heard of its wealth and fruitfulness, by the testimony of others or the teaching of the Word, have you replied, all unbelievably, "We are not able. No; I shall never be any different; I shall never rise above my natural infirmities; I shall never lay aside every weight and master the sins that do most easily beset me. It's all very fine in theory, this doctrine of sanctification by faith, but it breaks down in practice. The cities are great and fenced up unto heaven, and the sons of Anak, men of great stature, defy our powers. It's no use; we must make the best we can of the wilderness, though it is such an evil place." And so have you grown accustomed to failure, and cease to be surprised at it, or indeed to expect anything better.



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But, oh! it's weary work; and sometimes your heart fails you because of the way, as you ask, "Was it for this I came up out of Egypt?—for this I turned my back upon the world and its pleasures and gains? I thought I had found something really worth having when I accepted the offer of the Gospel; but really now my religion seems to do so little for me, that I am positively ashamed to press its acceptance on others, or to speak as if it could ever do for them what it has failed to do for me."

"And shall we then for ever live  
At this poor dying rate?"

O child of God, it is high time you got back again to the place you started from. Go down into the water a second time, and learn, better than you have ever yet learned, what it is to be baptized into the death of Christ, and raised in His resurrection. Fall back upon the great fact of Redemption, and reflect on what it means. Remember those triumphant anticipations, which were as reasonable as your murmurings and unbelief have been unjustifiable, and dare to claim that they shall even now be fulfilled in your experience. Move on to Abel-Shittah, and blend your tears with those of the Israelites as they mourn under the acacia-trees yonder (for such is the significance of the name). Yes, for thirty days did they mourn at Abel-Shittim, not more for the loss of their leader, as I think, than at the recollection of how they had treated him; and well is it when we begin to mourn, not so much at our own disappointments as at the thought of all the disappointments that we have caused Him. Ah, that we should ever have hardened our hearts to tempt and prove the Holy One of Israel! Here let us humble ourselves at His feet; here let us descend once again into His tomb. Here let us renounce once and for ever our miserable unbelief, and dare to go forward, led by the Ark of the Covenant.

To-day He meets us in our wilderness, and speaks to our hearts; and He will give us vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope, and there we shall sing once more as in the days of our youth, as when we came out of Egypt; and still our song shall be, "The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is His name. *He* hath triumphed gloriously. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."

## The Crossing of the Jordan.

“Sanctify yourselves: for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.”  
*Joshua* iii. 5.

WE were dwelling in our last sermon upon the sorrowful contrast between the confident anticipations with which the Israelites looked forward in their moment of triumph on the shore of the Red Sea, to a career of success and victory, and the actual facts of that career as recorded in the history of their wanderings in the wilderness. Forty long weary years have passed away since that song of triumph re-echoed along the shores, where the ransomed Israelites stood gazing in wonder and awe upon the watery grave of their ruthless oppressors. Forty years, and yet those confident anticipations were still unjustified by subsequent facts; they were not yet in enjoyment of their promised heritage; the Canaanites were not yet subdued, and the holy place was not yet in the hands of the worshippers of Jehovah. We noticed, too, how soon the singing gave place to murmuring, and how murmuring bred unbelief, until at last they shut themselves out of their Land of Promise, and brought down upon themselves a bitter and a life-long disappointment. The moral of the sad story is all summed up in one familiar sentence—“We see that they could not enter in, because of their unbelief.”

We pass on now to consider no longer the anticipations of faith, but the realizations of experience, the actual fulfilment of those bright hopes which for a time seemed dead and buried. After all they were right, those joyful singers; they did not expect a bit too much or feel too strong a confidence in the divine purpose; they were right in thinking that the first great deliverance contained the pledge and assurance of all that was to follow; they went wrong only when they lost sight of this cardinal truth, and began to doubt the faithfulness and the changeless love of a God to whom they owed their all. Oh, if they had gone on singing all the way in the same spirit of jubilant confidence, what a different story would have been

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left on record, and how much of misery, and suffering, and of bitter disappointment might they have been spared !

From all this we drew the lesson that spiritual disappointments are self-caused. God does not break His promises, nor fall short of the expectations of His people. If our experiences do not come up to our expectations, we may safely conclude that we have ourselves to thank for it. Either we have been slow to learn those elementary lessons which we need to acquire, before we can go on to enjoy the full privileges of a Christian life, or we have failed to exercise the true courage of faith, and to go forth against the sons of Anak in the same spirit in which David went forth against Goliath of Gath. "I come against thee in the name of the God of the armies of Israel whom thou hast defied." We have in our hearts limited the Holy One of Israel, and according to our unbelief so has it been done unto us.

Such is the lesson of warning conveyed to us in the dolorous tale. But there is also a lesson of encouragement to be gleaned from the sequel, and it is to this we have to address ourselves to-day. Although unbelief brought judgment in its train, and the carcasses of the rebels were left in the wilderness, yet the nation itself, and it is with this that the type is concerned, did at last enter into the promised land, and became possessed of its long desired inheritance. And from this we may learn not to despair even though we are thoroughly dissatisfied, and even disappointed with ourselves and with our spiritual experience. Thank God, we may wander long and wearily in the wilderness and yet not perish in the wilderness ; and although we may have caused no small provocation to our long-suffering God, He may not yet have sworn of us in His wrath that we shall never enter into His rest.

Our subject to-day brings before us a scene, which in many of its features reminds us of that memorable night in which the Lord led Israel forth by that unexpected way, through the waters of the sea, from the house of bondage into liberty, from cruel slavery into the joy of a new national life. Now there is much to be learned from considering both the points of similarity and of contrast in those two memorable events. First we notice that in both cases there was a going down into the element of water, and a rising up out of it into an entirely new position—the mystical symbol of death, and burial, and of resurrection. In both cases by this passage through water a

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complete separation was effected between the old and the new state of things, and in both cases the passage indicated the commencement of a new and happy career. The life in the wilderness, at any rate in its early days, was greatly preferable to the grim slavery of Egypt, and the conquering progress through Canaan was even more preferable still to the weary wanderings through the desert. In each case the water, which naturally should have been an obstacle, became, we may say, an assistance, and that which naturally should have been a cause of danger became a means of safety. And in both cases this was caused by a distinct divine intervention, and in each case that manifestation of supernatural power was associated with a symbol of the divine presence, though the symbols in the two cases were different—in the first it was the fiery pillar, in the second it was the ark of the covenant.

Nor are the points of contrast less striking than the points of agreement. The frenzied terror, the fearful excitement which pervaded that terrified multitude at the Red Sea is conspicuous by its absence on this occasion; they are no longer fleeing from destruction and death, but passing on to a higher and happier kind of life. There all was confusion and dismay until the panic-stricken multitude began to see their safety printed on those strange watery walls that frowned over them on either side. Here all was order and discipline—the disorderly rabble has become an organized army; every tribe has its chief, its officers, and its banner, and every man knows his proper place, and takes good care to occupy it. There the foe was behind, aggressively pursuing; here the foes were before, but only thinking of how they might defend themselves from so formidable an adversary. There Israel feared, and the Egyptians were confident. Here Israel is confident while their enemies are terror-stricken. There in the end the enemy is overthrown simply by the hand of God without any human assistance; the Israelites have but to stand still and see the salvation of God. Here the enemy is to be faced by the warriors of Israel, and to be overcome not less by divine power, but by that power exercised and employed in the believing efforts of courageous men. There they were passing from a fertile land into a howling desert, where they would have to depend on a miracle for every meal. Here they were passing from a waste of desert into a fertile land—a land that flowed with milk and honey. There we hear an outburst of triumphant enthu-

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siasm when the sea was crossed, and loud songs of triumph rang forth from the vast multitude as the returning wave submerged the Egyptians. Here all seems to have been calm and solemn, the only expression of strong feeling was the setting up of those memorial stones as if a deep and lasting recollection of this great fact were aimed at rather than an evanescent excitement.

In both cases, observe, we are contemplating a scene of salvation, yet is there a great difference between the salvation effected in the one case and in the other. In both cases the salvation comes through a divinely-appointed *Saviour*; but even between these there is a contrast. Moses was the Saviour *from*, Joshua was the Saviour *into*. Moses was sent to save Israel *from* the land of Egypt, and from the tyranny of Pharaoh, and he did it when he led the people through the Red Sea. His very name is suggestive in this respect, for you remember he was called Moses because he was drawn out of the water, and as he himself was saved from Pharaoh by being put into the water, and from the water by being drawn out of it; so he was the means of saving the Israelites by leading them into and guiding them through, and drawing them out of, the water. The Church in the wilderness, like its leader, was saved by being drawn out of the water, while the Egyptians were left to perish in it; and in that water they were cut off from their old connection with the land of Egypt; they were separated from the house of bondage, and set apart unto the Lord. They rose from the water a new nation—a nation regenerate by divine intervention, a nation of priests unto God, and if they had only remained steadfast in faith it would have been their privilege to have marched straight on to take possession in a few short months of the promised land.

But while Moses was a saviour *from*, who drew his people from the water, and brought them thus into liberty, so Joshua, on the other hand, was a saviour *into*; his name means the Lord, the Saviour, and is, as we all know, the same as that which God appointed for the Saviour of the human race. The great work of Joshua's life was a work of salvation; but I wish you to observe that it was, so to speak, a positive salvation where Moses's was a negative one. It was a salvation *into* the enjoyment of that good land which, however, it was an absolute necessity that they should possess themselves of, unless, indeed, as a nation, they were to become extinct. It was a salvation that



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Joshua was the means of working out for Israel ; but it was a salvation by aggression, not by resistance. It can hardly be said that any of Joshua's wars were defensive except before the period of the crossing of the Jordan. It was Joshua's part to save the people aggressively, and he led them on and on in an almost unbroken career of triumph until the whole land lay at his feet ready to be meted out for the possession of the people. Even so, my dear friends, the salvation we have to contemplate to day is not so much a salvation from as a salvation into—not merely a salvation from the condemnation of God against our sin, or again a salvation from the ancient tyranny of Satan over our manhood as represented by the yoke of Pharaoh, but it is a salvation into the full possession of our human nature for His purposes, and in His name—a salvation by which we are to take possession of every faculty and element of our being, and hold it for God, entering upon a blessed experience in which we find all the promises of God yea and amen to us. And this Land of Fulfilled Promises proves indeed a land flowing with milk and honey—a rich and fruitful inheritance, where God can reap a harvest in us, and we ourselves enjoy that fulness of blessing and spiritual gratification which God designs for us, even while we are still here on earth.

Now observe—and I wish you to lay stress upon this consideration—that this passing over the Jordan is in some respects a sort of repetition of what occurred at the Red Sea, and in many of their features the two events are closely similar and parallel to each other. In both cases the Israelites are brought face to face with a watery barrier, and in both cases they are utterly unable to pass over it. In both cases an act of faith is required ; in both cases the result of that act of faith is a miracle ; and in both cases the water which seemed to be a barrier becomes a shield and a protection. The Red Sea threatened to prevent the Israelites from making their escape from Egypt ; but at the touch of the finger of God that barrier became a means of protection while they made their escape. In the same way Jordan promised to be a barrier between them and the promised land ; but at a touch from the finger of God that very barrier became a means of protecting them as they crossed over into the promised land.

But for divine intervention, they might have had to make a bridge of boats, or of a multitude of rafts, or something of that kind ; and, as you are aware, there is no moment when an

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army is more helplessly exposed to attack than when it is crossing over a swollen river. That would have been the moment when the enemy could have done their worst. In thus crossing an army cannot all go over at once ; one portion must go over at a time, and this small force has to face the full strength of the enemy, who may perhaps sweep down upon them with an irresistible onslaught, and cut them in pieces, ere yet the main body of the troops can be got across. And so we can easily understand how difficult a thing it would have been to get the Israelites safely across Jordan but for this divine intervention. But as soon as God touched the waters of Jordan, that which seemed to have been an impediment became their protection, and on they went in perfect security ; while their enemies felt their courage passing away from them, and their hearts sinking for fear, as they witnessed this extraordinary intervention of spiritual power.

But observe this : that this memorable miracle, which in its salient features seems to be a repetition of that great and glorious miracle that occurred at the exodus, was only rendered necessary by the waywardness and unbelief which Israel had exhibited in the wilderness. If you will look at your maps, you will see that when first Israel approached the promised land they came to Kadesh-Barnea. There was no Jordan there (Jordan was perhaps a hundred miles up north), and there was no kind of natural barrier between the wilderness in which they were and the promised land into which they had to go ; nor was there even any outward line of demarcation. As they moved forward—if they had been faithful to God—from Kadesh-Barnea, they would have found the desert soon change into rich, verdant pasture-land ; they would soon have been in the midst of the land which flowed with milk and honey, without any very marked territorial limits being recognized. In fact, after a few months in the wilderness, this happy people might have gone on, carrying all before them, securing victory after victory, and taking easy possession of the land without any crossing of Jordan at all. The lesson of the Red Sea would then have been fresh in their minds, and fresh in the minds of their enemies ; and therefore God would never have had to bring them back again to the waters of judgment, and cause them to submit once more to a symbolical burial. Nor would He have had a second time to impress the imaginations of their enemies with a sense of His omnipotent power.

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And all this may throw much light upon a question that seems greatly to exercise the minds of some, especially just at present. It is unquestionably a fact, that long after their conversion some Christians pass through an experience so marked and definite in its character, and leading to such happy and unmistakeable consequences in their subsequent lives, that some teachers give to this great inward change the name of a second conversion. Others speak of it as entire sanctification, and urge upon all indiscriminately the necessity of passing through some such definite experience. Now two things are equally plain from this narrative. The first is, that the crossing of the Jordan did mark a very definite epoch in the history of the Israelites, and served to emphasize a crisis in their history, out of which they passed into a new and far more satisfactory condition. The second is, that this crossing of the Jordan, nevertheless, would not have been necessary at all, but for the backsliding and perversity and unbelief of the Israelites. The lesson of divine power exercised over the very elements, and over that element which, but for the intervention of an omnipotent hand, must have destroyed those whom it now protected, and the pledge that such a miracle contained for the future—all this would have been fresh in the minds of the Israelites when they first reached Kadesh-Barnea, and would have required no repetition. But when their unbelief had shut them out of Canaan, and forty long years had passed away, then the lessons of the Red Sea had to be learnt again, and an experience had to be passed through not less definite than that which we witnessed there.

Here then, as it seems to me, is the key to the true doctrine of sanctification furnished us in the type, as it is afterwards taught us in plain terms in New Testament Scripture. We nowhere find any doctrinal statement in New Testament Scripture that an act of sanctification equally definite and distinct with the act of justification is to be looked for in Christian experience. Rather we may say that all New Testament teaching on the subject of sanctification is based upon an appeal to the true import and significance of justification. It would seem as if the object of apostolic writers were not so much to lead on to some fresh act of sanctification as to induce a more full and adequate apprehension of the benefits already secured to us by justification. It will be found on careful examination that almost all the passages that

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are relied upon by the advocates of the theory that I am speaking of refer to the moment of justification, and not to any subsequent epoch in spiritual experience to which the name of sanctification may be given. And the reason of this is plain. The atonement is the fountain and source alike of justification and of sanctification. It is by the death and resurrection of Christ that we are saved not only from the judgment of God against sin, but from the sin that causes the judgment, and both these aspects of our deliverance are presented to us simultaneously when we intelligently grasp the true significance of the cross. Where this is the case we begin at once to feel the sanctifying influence of the atonement; and if we go on to walk in Christ Jesus *as* we originally received Him, our experience of the power of His resurrection will go on deepening and extending until we find ourselves entering upon a career of progressive self-conquest that must introduce us into a veritable land of Canaan.

If, on the other hand, as is too often the case, we only learn the lesson of the cross very partially and insufficiently to start with, and go on carelessly and faithlessly, as the Israelites did, proceeding to forget in great measure what we once have learned, if we do not backslide and apostatize altogether, we must needs at any rate entail upon ourselves a weary and protracted sojourn in the wilderness, a loss of joy, and a loss of power, and a degradation of our experience to a type altogether lower than that which properly belongs to the healthy Christian. And then it sometimes happens—and a good thing, under those circumstances, it is when it does happen—that after long weary years, possibly, of wandering in the wilderness, there comes a great and very marked change in the experience of the soul. We are brought back very much to our starting-point. Once again we find ourselves face to face with the water, the emblem of God's judgment against man's sin; once again we find ourselves buried between watery walls; once again we are brought back to learn again the primary lesson of death and resurrection, and from sorrowful and humbling experiences of this nature we pass on to an altogether new level of life—a life of conquest and power, where our previous experience had been a life of failure and weakness, a life of acquisition and possession, where our previous experience had been one of perennial loss.

Thank God that it is so in some cases, even with those who

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have spent a very long time in the wilderness. And yet while we thank God that it is so, must it not remain a matter for deep regret that such an experience should be necessary at all? How much more desirable it is that from the very first young Christians should learn the first great lesson of the cross so well, as that nothing like a repetition of it should be in any way required. How much more satisfactory that they should, from the very first, reckon themselves as dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord ; as crucified to the world ; their flesh, with its affections and lusts, nailed to the tree ; and as bound over by the very terms of their redemption to live not unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again.

These lessons *may* be learnt at first, and from the very first we may begin to live in the power of them. Why should it not be so? Above all, why should we so speak as if it were a thing to be expected—indeed the normal course of events—that after conversion there should be a long dreary period of wilderness wandering, followed by a marked and definite experience of a second inward change? If we have yielded to unbelief, and forfeited the blessings that might have been ours, because we were so slow to learn the lessons of the wilderness, then by all means let us seek a passage through the divided Jordan into our Promised Land, and learn afresh the lesson we learned too imperfectly at the Red Sea. But better far that we should from the first have the eyes of our understanding enlightened, that we may know what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe. (Eph. i. 18, 19.)

I was much struck with the remark of a dear friend of mine—one who has taken a prominent part in recent efforts to excite an interest on the subject of sanctification, and whose teaching has, I believe, been the means of bringing many across the Jordan. It was shortly after I had devoted myself entirely to mission work that he said to me with great emphasis, “Now, my dear brother, you are going to give yourself up to the work of preaching the Gospel, and I hope the Lord will give you many converts. But let me say a word to you about them. My dear brother, whatever you do, try and bring them in at Kadesh-Barnea ; don’t tell them that they’ve got to go wandering in the wilderness for forty years.” I have never forgotten his words ; and how I long for you young Christians who are just starting forwards from the Red Sea



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that you may be spared these forty years of weary wandering ; that it should not be necessary for you to go on year after year murmuring over your doubts and fears, your disappointments and your barrenness, your dulness and deadness, your infirmities and failures. Oh, it is weary work this ! I pray you avoid it. My heart's desire for you is that from the very first you may go on in one steady march of faith and hope, seeking, like St. Paul, to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death ; not as though you had already attained, or were already perfect, because you have begun to learn the lesson of the Red Sea, but pressing on to apprehend that for which you are apprehended, stretching towards the mark for the prize for your high calling in Christ Jesus.

We have seen that both the passage of the Red Sea and the passage of the Jordan were miracles of salvation wrought for Israel by God. We have also to notice that they are both instances of salvation *by water*. We hear of another salvation by water before either of these, and what we know about it may cast some light upon the significance of this same element of water in the typical teaching of these events, which seem to have been so full of allegorical import. St. Peter, referring to this earlier salvation, tells us that Noah and his family were saved by water, and he adds that "baptism," as the antitype of this, "doth also save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*." Now here it is to be observed that the salvation which St. Peter refers to is salvation by water, not by the ark. That water signified God's judgment upon a guilty world, and was the means of carrying out that judgment ; and herein is the key to the true significance of the element of water in the symbolism of Holy Scripture. Water represents overwhelming judgment, and salvation by water shadows forth to us the great theological verity that spiritual salvation is by judgment. It is by God's judgment upon sin that we are to be saved from sin ; by His judgment upon the world we are to be saved from the world.

Look at the words again, and observe carefully what they state as to the connection of the type and antitype. St. Peter is speaking of the ark, "wherein few," saith he—that is, eight—"souls were saved"—*from* water ? No ; that is not the point of the parallelism, but, "were saved *by* water." The

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water was the means of *saving* them. This may seem strange ; for we naturally think of the water as that which caused them danger ; but on reflection we see that they needed to be saved with a double salvation. They needed to be saved from the judgment of God, but they also needed to be saved from that corrupt condition of things which had provoked the judgment of God, so that as a family they might have an entirely new start in a new world, which, by the waters of judgment, had been swept clean of its pollutions. Thus the water was between them and the world which God had cursed, and the ark was between them and the water. Take away the ark, and they would have been drowned in the water. Take away the water, and they would have fallen back into the world which God had condemned. The water was given them that they should be saved from the world ; the ark was given that they should be saved from the water. The antediluvian world represents the old natural condition of fallen man, and from this we are to be saved by death and burial together with Christ ; while we are to be raised into the new life by participation in His resurrection ; and thus St. Peter is careful to say that we are saved through the waters of Baptism by the resurrection of Christ.

This judgment operates to cut you off from the old, while the passage from judgment serves to introduce you into the new ; and as you are in Christ, just as Noah was in the ark, the judgment, which would otherwise destroy you, on the contrary, saves you. The water saved Noah from the old world because Noah was in the ark ; and even so the waters of judgment, that would destroy and overwhelm me, on the contrary, save me from the sin that pollutes the world, from the powers of darkness by which I am surrounded, and from the tyranny of evil, because I am in Christ. And thus I am raised up through Jesus into a new—a resurrection life ; just as Noah came out of the ark into a new—a resurrection world.

Just see how complete the symbolism is, and let us learn what it teaches. Remember that the waters of Baptism drown you if you are out of Christ ; for they symbolize God's judgment against your sin ; but if you are in Christ, they save you from your former self. That the subject may not be needlessly involved, consider the plan of this sacrament in the case of an adult, such an one as was Saul of Tarsus, to whom Ananias exclaimed, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away

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thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord." If such an adult as Saul of Tarsus had ventured into the waters of Baptism without first of all identifying himself with Jesus Christ by faith in Him; if he had gone down into the waters of Baptism apart from Jesus Christ, and without seeing himself one with and represented by Him, the waters would have been an outward and visible sign of God's judgment against his sin, and he would have been, so to speak, endorsing by his own act God's condemnation against him. But when such an one goes down to the waters of Baptism identifying himself with Jesus, and in that very act seeing himself buried in Jesus' grave, in order that he may be raised with Jesus a new creature, then, instead of the waters drowning him, he comes up from the water into newness of life. The waters of God's judgment cannot overwhelm us, because they have already overwhelmed Him, against whom they had no claim, save in so far as He represented us. *He* could truly say, "Deep calleth unto deep because of the noise of thy water-floods: all thy waves and thy storms have gone over me." But because He has voluntarily sounded those depths for us, the waters of judgment have no claim against us. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Well this typical teaching given in the circumstances of the flood is repeated at the Red Sea. Here again there is a salvation by water. The presence of Christ with His people, and His identification of Himself with them, saves them from the water, while the water saves them from all the pollutions of Egypt as well as from the tyranny of Pharaoh. But those Israelites subsequently reproduced a sort of new Egypt within themselves by their disobedience, sensuality, and idolatry, and from this they had to be delivered once more by a fresh passage through the water ere they entered Canaan. In this they were once again saved *from* the water by the mystical presence of Christ,—by that Ark of the Covenant which was the outward symbol of His presence with them; but they were saved *by* the water from their former selves, as we may say—that old Egypt-like manner of life into which they had fallen.

And now here lies our practical lesson. Whether we have been baptized at the moment of our conversion, and actually expressed our faith in Christ for justification in submitting to the ordinance, as probably was the case with St. Paul, or whether we are baptized in unconscious infancy before our faith became

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operative, as is usually the case with us Church-people, or whether we are baptized long after justification, as in the case with modern Baptists, we cannot become truly justified without passing through that which the ordinance symbolizes—death and resurrection. But it may happen that our first apprehension of this wondrous provision may be somewhat incomplete. We may be so engrossed with the consideration of one element in it as to lose sight of others, and hence while we obtain that first great boon of justification to which our faith is directed, we may not become participators in the full benefit that redemption was designed to bestow.

I can well believe that there may have been many Christians in apostolic times who, when they submitted themselves to Baptism, had only this before their minds. They saw that Jesus had borne their condemnation, and died their death; they went with Him into the tomb, and showed themselves identified with Him in that condemnation; they rose up from that tomb to show themselves identified with Christ in His justification, for he that has died is justified from sin. They saw themselves coming under the judicial sentence in Christ's death, and justified in His resurrection; but their apprehension stopped short here; they saw this, and saw but little more.

But if this were so, I can imagine that there would come a time when these Christians would begin to feel thoroughly dissatisfied with themselves, and with their spiritual condition and experience, just as perhaps some of us do. Now let us suppose that, after this state of things had continued for some time, in sore distress of soul such a Christian applied to St. Paul, or any other apostolic preacher, for help and counsel, can we doubt, from what we find in the Epistles, what the response would be? Would not the Apostle take such an one back to the waters of Baptism? and though he would not have repeated the ordinance (that seems never to have been done), would he not endeavour to impress upon his mind the full import of the ordinance, and of the redemption to which the ordinance bears witness? and would he not also go on to endeavour to lead up the man's heart to a definite, believing, apprehension of the benefit within his reach?

“To what then wast thou baptized, my brother?” I can imagine him saying. “Or dost thou not know that all we who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? We were buried with Him through our baptism into His death,

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that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so should we also walk in newness of life. Reckon thou thyself to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ thy Lord. Thou hast been circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. Thou hast been buried with Him in thy baptism, wherein also thou hast been raised up with Him through thy faith in the operation of God. Put off then by faith the sins and evil qualities that thou deplorest, because in that baptism thou hast put off the old man, and put on those holy qualities that thou desirest to be possessed of, because thou hast already put on the new man. Knowest thou not that Christ gave Himself for thee that He might redeem thee from all iniquity, and purchase thee to Himself for His own possession? Knowest thou not that by the precious blood of Jesus, as our brother Simon Peter has taught us, we are redeemed from our old conversation received by tradition from the fathers—that unhappy heirloom which has been passed down through the long ages from father to son all along the line of Adam. From this thou hast been redeemed, claim then the benefit of redemption, and thou shalt find that sin shall not have dominion over thee; for thou art not under the law, but under grace. Come with me once again to the cross, and learn its lesson better than thou didst learn it before, when thou camest first.”

Can we doubt, I say, that such would be St. Paul's response? But in giving such advice what would he be doing? Why just what God in His providence did to the Israelites when He led them a second time into the water, and brought them through the water out into a new career of obedience, of power, and of acquisition.

And now let us learn a few practical lessons from this incident; and first, we saw in our last sermon how Israel mourned at Abel-Shittim, not only as I judged for Moses, but at the thought of the way in which they had used Moses; and surely such an experience of mourning and humiliation is the first step towards better things. But regrets become vain when they do not lead to new and better experiences; and so there comes to those mourners the call, “Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over Jordan unto the land that I do give thee.” Rise from the regrets of the past into the acquisitions of the future. Dry your tears, and claim your heritage.



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And here is the first step, "Sanctify yourselves, for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

Sanctify yourselves. This is God's call to those of us who would fain cross over the Jordan. Put away every unclean thing—all that interferes with the divine operation. Is there anything that stands between you and God? any sin that you are cherishing? any carnal lust that you are yielding to? any worldly desire that you are allowing yourself to be distracted with, although you know it paralyses your energy, and keeps you back from the proper enjoyment of God? Sanctify yourselves. Draw near towards the Most Holy; expose your heart to him. O God! O God!

"The dearest idol I have known,  
Whate'er that idol be,  
Help me to tear it from my throne,  
And only worship Thee."

And the next lesson is, *Expect!* To-morrow the Lord will do wonders amongst you. Only by a miracle of grace can you be raised to your true level of Christian experience, and brought into the land that flows with milk and honey. Your heavenly leader seems to ask, "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" Oh, let Him be answered from the bottom of your heart with a fervent "Yea, Lord; there is nothing too hard for Thee!"

Then comes the great fact, the pledge and presage of all coming victories: "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out the Canaanites from before you. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. . . . And it shall come to pass, as soon as the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap." Go down again into the place of death and burial, but see your Lord there before you, a pledge that when you pass through the waters, because He is with thee, the floods shall not overflow thee. Go down into the place of judgment, and see thine old wilderness life, with all its waywardness and wilfulness, judged, condemned, and left behind thee for ever.

Gaze upon the wondrous scene. At the bidding of God the waters are divided, and the priests march down into the deep

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channel which Jordan had worn in the plain. There they stand quietly, calmly, patiently. They were not going to move over until the last little tiny child of Israel had crossed. Look ! the waters are rising higher and higher ; but the watery mountain does not flow down. The great law of gravitation seems for the moment suspended ; nature herself gives way before the imperious command of the Deity. There stand the priests while the people pass over, the ark of God's covenant turning the waters of judgment into the mystery of salvation.

See, now they are emerging on the other side. The presence of the Lord of the whole earth has restrained the impetuous flood ; and now the last of the vast caravan has passed over, and the twelve stones of memorial are taken from the depths of the channel, and borne by stalwart warriors to the other side ; and then at last the sacred ark moves also, and reaches the shore of Canaan. Hark ! the thunder crash of waters. The pent-up element, as if delighting in its new-found liberty, sweeps down towards the Dead Sea ; but as the strange highway closes up, the Israelites find themselves cut off for ever from the weary wilderness, and in that fresh miracle over nature they see a pledge of future miracles over man. The walls of Jericho are already staggering to their fall ; the kings of Canaan are already doomed ; every place where their foot falls is their own ; and the promises of God are proved to be yea and amen at last.

Fear not, Christian brothers, the land is yours, and when once the great lesson of redemption is fully learned, none can keep you out of it. Go on triumphantly, for the ark of the covenant goeth before. Dare to possess the land. Let your Captain hear you say, "'Tis mine, my Lord, for thou hast promised it to me ; 'tis doubly mine, for thou hast given it to me. I will not fear the sons of Anak, nor despair before the walls of Jericho."

"Where our banners lead us  
We may safely go ;  
Where our Chief precedes us  
We may face the foe ;  
His right arm is o'er us,  
He our Guide will be :  
Christ has gone before us,  
Christians, follow ye."

God of our salvation, bring us in ! Bring us in, and the kingdom shall be thine !

## “Why cannot I Follow Thee now?”

“Lord, why cannot I follow thee now.”

*John xiii. 37.*

WHY could not Simon Peter follow his Lord and Master there and then? There could be no doubt of his sincerity, nor could there be any question as to his attachment to his Master. He loved that Master dearly, and for His sake he had turned his back upon his little all. For more than three years he had been walking about, sharing that Master's lot, and yet when the last moment draws nigh, and our blessed Lord is about to pass along that mysterious pathway of sorrow and suffering appointed Him by the Father, and on through a shameful death to a glorious resurrection, He had to tell His favourite disciple, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now.”

I cannot believe that our blessed Lord merely referred to the fact that the time for Simon Peter's departure into the other world had not yet arrived. That, of course, was true; but I do not believe that our Lord would have used the expression “follow me” if that had been all He intended to convey. He would rather have employed the language of verse 33: “Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come.” But here He does not say, “Thou canst not come;” but, “Thou canst not *follow* me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.” The word is a very suggestive one, and one ever employed in a definite sense throughout the whole of the New Testament scriptures.

Further, as a matter of fact, Simon Peter did follow the Lord Jesus Christ so far as he could have followed Him without dying; for there was still a considerable portion of ground to be traversed by those sacred feet, and Christ's way from that point was about to lie through the most perilous and trying scenes of His earthly experience. There lay before Him the sorrows of Gethsemane, the mock trial in the judgment-hall;

*"Why cannot I Follow Thee now?"*

there lay before Him the way of sorrows, crowned with the cross on Calvary. Up to that point Simon Peter might have faithfully followed his Lord ; but, as a matter of fact, he could not and did not. Now our Lord was, I believe, referring to this first, though His words may have reached on to the glory that was at last to be revealed. The time of His departure from earth was not yet actually come, though it was drawing near ; but the time was already come when His disciples were to be scattered every one to his own and to leave Him alone, and yet not alone. And knowing this, He says, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now ; but thou shalt follow me afterwards."

And it is equally true that this same Simon Peter did follow the Lord Jesus Christ afterwards in the same sense in which he was now precluded from following Him ; and in my next sermon we shall consider the question, "How came it to pass that this same Simon Peter was enabled to follow the Lord Jesus Christ after all, and to follow Him so fully?" But our inquiry to-day is, Why could not Simon Peter follow the Lord Jesus then?

As we ask the question, we are led to consider our own personal experience. Does not a similar sense of disability seem familiar to us? Is it not true that there sometimes seems to rise up in the very path of our inclinations and spiritual aspirations a strange, indescribable barrier—an inexorable "*cannot*" that seems to bar the way to further progress, rendering it impossible for us to follow on to know the Lord, or to attain to that conformity to the divine image for which our hearts are longing? Do we not sometimes feel as though some stern voice were sounding in our ear the mournful tidings, the very death-knell of our higher hopes, "Whither Jesus goes, you cannot follow Him now?" It is not so much that we want the will or, at any rate, the wish. The earnest desire sometimes seems to burn within our hearts ; and when we ask ourselves why we have not done it, does it not appear to us as if the reason were that we *could* not, rather than that we *would* not? We wish to follow Christ, and to rise to higher things ; but some strange power which we cannot define, and whose nature we cannot even discover, but of whose operations we are perfectly cognizant, seems to meet us with a stern, inexorable "*nay*." "Whither I go, ye cannot follow me now."

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If this should be so with any of us—I do not say with all (for I would be glad to believe that there are but few of us in this case)—but if it should be so with any of us, were it not wise to put the question, "Lord, why cannot we follow Thee now?" I am speaking at this moment to those who are true and sincere believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. You believe you do love Him as Simon Peter loved Him; you wish to follow Him as Peter would, and yet you keep at a distance from Him. You feel the strongest desire to live in closer fellowship, but time passes away, and you seem to draw no nearer. "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now?" It is wise, I say, to ask this question, for if it be honestly put, with the unflinching intention to come by the truth, we may be assured that the Holy Spirit of God will sooner or later discover to us the secret cause of our failure—will show us what gives strength to this cruel and pitiless "*cannot*."

Now we may learn something on this point by studying the experience of Simon Peter, and by considering what were the barriers that kept him then from realizing in his own personal experience what it is to follow Jesus. Why could not Simon follow Jesus then? I reply, in the first place, probably it was *because he thought he could*. Yes, he felt sure he could. The chivalrous Peter exclaims, with all possible assurance of his own courage and determination, "Why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake." And very likely, had we been there, we should have seen the flush of enthusiasm pass over his face, and should have been constrained to believe, from his very manner and gestures, that he meant what he said. And if we had been in the garden of Gethsemane, and had seen him there draw his sword from its scabbard, and at the risk of his own life smite at the head of the high priest's servant on behalf of his Master, we should have felt no uncertainty as to the reality of Simon Peter's devotion to Christ.

And yet it was perfectly true that Simon Peter could not follow Jesus then just because "*he thought he could*." There is nothing more common amongst Christians than the admission of our own frailty and weakness. We are all ready with such assertions. Orthodoxy expects it of us; and were a man to make a contrary statement, he would hardly be looked upon as a Christian at all. Were a man to say he could do this or that in overcoming evil, without qualifying his assertion by some



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familiar phrase, such as "By God's help," you would regard such an one as a religious braggart, and think of him as a heathen man, or at best a Pharisee. But oh, what a great difference there is between making in general terms these orthodox admissions of our infirmity, and having a real inward moral consciousness of our own personal helplessness and our entire dependence on a higher power.

Sometimes, it may be, we get as far as feeling ourselves to be a little weaker than we should be, and being a little ashamed of our own infirmity; but that is a different thing from a consciousness of helplessness. And sometimes we go further, taught by many disasters, and entertain serious misgivings and apprehensions about ourselves; but it is wonderful how elastic a thing is self-confidence, and how it rebounds from the most distressing humiliations. We are quite determined to be more careful in the future. We will see to it that the fault shall not be repeated; our mind is fully made up against it; and so we struggle on till another fall lays us in despair. But oh, how slow we are to abandon all confidence in the flesh, to feel that we are not only weak, but absolutely helpless. And it is not until we have learnt this lesson of our complete and helpless dependence that we can hope to follow Jesus. For flesh and blood can no more participate in the fellowship of Jesus' sufferings than they can inherit the kingdom of God. It is only by the Christ within that I can be raised to the level of the life of the Christ without.

But Simon Peter was a man of much natural resolution, and of strong determination. Perhaps it may also be surmised that he was a man of undisciplined mind and will; and such characters, while they possess some great advantages over others, are specially liable to fall into this particular snare. They find it very hard to renounce all confidence in this moral vigour and natural courage and determination. And such, like Peter, have a great deal to unlearn before they can follow Jesus; they have to be stripped before they can be clothed, and emptied before they can be filled. And how many of us shrink from this humiliating process!

It seemed to him a thing incredible that he should turn his back upon his Master. "What!" he might have said, "have I not already given sufficient proof of my affection? When the thousands who flocked around Him turned their backs, and went away to their farms and their merchandize, and left Him

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alone, was I not one of the little group who still surrounded Him in the synagogue at Capernaum? and did I not hear Him say, 'Will ye also go away?' And did I not respond, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' Surely I could never turn my back upon my Lord."

So Peter felt; and so we often feel, do we not? And we can scarcely bring ourselves to believe that we could condescend to the little sins, or perhaps to the great sin, which subsequently we commit. No; we feel, with a certain amount of assurance, that we really are superior to that sort of thing; and then by-and-by we learn our weakness by some grievous fall, and realize it amidst our bitter tears and grievous lamentations, as Simon Peter did. For I would have you know, my dear Christian brethren, that if the Lord cannot teach us in any other way, He will teach us by failure; though, surely, that is the most expensive school in which we can be taught. We have to pay the highest fees there, and we have to receive our instruction and education there under the least pleasant possible circumstances; aye, and while you may learn there, you have to remember, that you cannot receive such lessons without incurring much spiritual loss, and perhaps not without inflicting injury on others as well as on yourselves. It is the least desirable of all the schools that we can attend, this School of Failure, which is really the discipline-class in the School of Experience; and God does not send us there, I am quite sure, till He sees that nothing else can bring us down to our true level—strip us of our self-confidence, and bring us into closer fellowship with Himself. I believe He permits the evil one to put a stumbling-block in the way of His self-confident children, just that they may learn what a broken reed they rest upon when they trust to their own determination and strength of character.

Then comes the humiliating fall; and when the sorrowing and downcast soul has been taught by such a fall to distrust self and cling to Christ, he rises from it sore, and wounded, and bruised—perhaps, indeed, doomed to carry the scar of that fall to his grave; but in one respect stronger than he was before, because he knows now, more than ever heretofore, how real his weakness is.

But let me ask again the question, Why could not Simon Peter follow Jesus then? And I would suggest the answer, Because it would appear that *he was at this time walking by*

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*sight rather than by faith.* In this answer we have the positive lesson suggested to our minds, which may be regarded as the complement of the negative lesson on which we have just been enlarging. And the two come in this order; for we do not reach the life of real faith till we have first of all become fully conscious of our own helplessness. How can we really trust Christ unless we have thoroughly learnt to distrust ourselves? If your confidence is built upon anything not Divine, you are not in a position to trust yourself to the Divine, and really to lean on Him; but when we have begun to distrust ourselves, and to rest on God, we find that all other forms of creature strength are equally untrustworthy. The world, with its vain appearances, is no more to be trusted than ourselves, and we turn from that which seems, to that which is.

But all this is otherwise when we are living and walking by sense rather than by faith; then we judge according to appearances, and are depressed or elated according as things seem to go well or ill; and thus all is uncertainty, and we are like a reed swayed to and fro, and remain quite incapable of following that Master whose faith in the Divine will enabled Him to triumph over sorrow and death, and to set His face like a flint against all the opposing forces of earth and hell.

Now Simon Peter was walking, it would seem, rather by sight than faith, and hence his courage and firmness were greatly dependent upon outward circumstances. As long as he saw Christ performing prodigies of spiritual power, or greeted by the enthusiastic hosannas of the multitude, it appeared easy to follow Him; but when all His glory seemed departed—when that right arm of power was bound with an iron fetter; when, instead of boisterous plaudits, the air rang with the hoarse cry of the bloodthirsty throng, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" his courage forsook him, and the enthusiasm that sprang from the things seen, with their disappearance began to melt away.

Ah! how many of us are fair-weather sailors! We seem to get on very well as long as the sea is only rippled with a friendly breeze; but when favourable influences are withdrawn, and opposition and hostility begin to manifest themselves, or when God Himself tries our faith by allowing us for a time to walk in darkness, then there is a terrible collapse, and the whole fabric of our confidence seems to come down with a crash. "We walk by faith, not by sight," says the Apostle. "We walk by sight, not by faith," say the lives of many of us who bear

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the Christian name ; and the result is, we cannot follow Jesus now ; for Jesus in the reality of His manhood had to walk by faith, even as we ; and it was by faith He worked, by faith He suffered, and in faith He died. The passion indeed was a triumph of faith, and hence those only who walk by faith can tread in His steps. The Master was at this moment about to step forth into the dark, and move along that gloomy and tragic path of sorrow which the will of the Father had indicated to Him ; the disciple could not pursue His steps because He lacked faith in that Father's will.

And if any of you feel as if you could not follow Jesus now, I would suggest to you the enquiry, Am I really walking by faith? Can I truly say, as St. Paul said, "The life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God?" If so, God can live in you ; and where He lives He can and will impart the needed strength to follow Him. But, alas ! how few there seem to be who in their daily life thus by faith lay hold of and possess themselves of God.

This leads us to a third answer to our enquiry—very closely connected with the one we have just been considering—"Why could not Simon Peter follow Jesus then?" I answer, *Because he was walking in the flesh rather than in the Spirit.* This same Simon Peter, only a few short weeks afterwards, when he was baptized with the Holy Ghost and with power, stood before the rulers of his country with unblanched countenance, and with a calm and quiet heart could bear witness to that Master whom he once denied. Now let us bear in mind that it was by the eternal Spirit that Jesus offered Himself ; that Spirit was, as it were, the fit Person, that led the Scapegoat of humanity into the wilderness for us. And the Spirit was able to complete this sacrifice of the humanity of Christ, because all through His human life Christ had been faithful to the leadings of that Spirit. It was doubtless by the Spirit He was moved to submit to the baptism of John, and that Spirit bore witness to His obedience as He brooded over the head of the submissive Son of man. It was by the Spirit that He was driven into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and by that same Spirit He was guided in His works and directed in His words. Thus, like a true Son of God, He was ever led by the Spirit of God, until, as Isaac was bound by Abraham, so by the eternal Spirit, Christ was bound to a felon's cross.

And for us also that Spirit is given. There is a title which

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belongs exclusively to our blessed Lord. He only is *the Christ*, the anointed One. But all who would follow Him need to be, like Him, anointed. The precious ointment poured upon the head is to run down to the skirts of the clothing, and only they who are partakers of this divine unction can really know the blessedness of following Christ.

This qualification for following Jesus is closely connected with that other to which I have just been referring. They represent, I may say, the two sides of a normal and healthy spiritual experience. Faith on our side brings us into contact with the divine, and puts the soul in the attitude of reception; the gift of the Holy Ghost on God's side brings the divine into contact with us, and fills us according to our capacity for reception. St. Paul binds these two sides of Christian experience together when he asks the Galatians, "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" evidently expecting the answer that it was by the hearing of faith that the Holy Ghost was received, as is illustrated by the story of Cornelius.

Now the Holy Spirit does enter and take possession of every heart that is fully surrendered to Christ, witnessing to our sonship, wakening new desires, freeing from the old law of sin and death. "But," says the Apostle, "if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit;" and his charge against the Galatian Christians is that, having begun in the Spirit, they had gone on to be made perfect in the flesh. Is not this where many of us lose our capacity to follow Christ? Instead of believing in Him as the new indwelling Lord of their life, and yielding themselves to be led by Him; instead of watching for His holy impulses, in order to obey them, and expecting to be anointed by Him for spiritual worship and for service, we substitute habit, routine, method, form, rules and regulations, all the paraphernalia, in fact, of spiritual bondage for His blessed presence and influence. We cease to be free as the wind, as everyone that is born of the Spirit should be; and at last we come to deserve the Apostle's withering censure, "Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"

And the energies of the flesh may be never so strong and never so well intentioned, but they cannot take the place of the powers of the Holy Ghost; and there is a point beyond which they cannot go in disposing us to follow Christ. Are we walking in the Spirit, or are we walking *as men*? that is to say,



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as those who are men only, and not men taken possession of, and, as it were, inhabited by God. Upon the answer to this question mainly depends our capacity or incapacity to follow Jesus now.

But once again we ask, "Why could not Simon Peter follow Jesus then?" And another answer I would suggest to you is this: He could not follow Him, *because he was out of sympathy and harmony with His mind.* "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Simon Peter had thoughts of his own, and Jesus Christ had thoughts of His own; rather, let me say, the thoughts of Jesus were the thoughts which the Father inspired. He was meditating on the Father's will, while the thoughts of Simon Peter were thoughts suggested by the mind and will of man. "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men;" and therefore Simon Peter could not follow Jesus. And if we are really to follow Him, how necessary it is that we should rise into the inner circle of His fellowship, and see things from His point of view. When we wander out of that charmed circle of true moral and spiritual fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, our most strenuous efforts to make progress only end in our losing ground, and falling further and further short of that to which we desire to attain. It is not by saying, "I will follow thee, thou blessed Jesus," that we succeed in following Him. It is rather by bringing our minds into the attitude of submission, and our hearts into full harmony with His Divine will. And the first step towards accepting the Divine will is taken when we repose our full confidence in it. He who fears the Divine will naturally will shrink from it, but He who is determined to trust it will soon learn to love it; and so it will be possible to have full fellowship with Him who told us that it was His meat and drink to do the will of the Father.

Jesus Christ was at this moment fulfilling in His own experience the language of the Psalm, "Lo! I come to do thy will; I am content to do it. Yea, thy law is within my heart." He was about to move forward in the lines of the divine will, and this was to land Him in sorrow, loss, desolation, and death. But He moved on and halted not, because He had the fullest possible confidence in it, and was persuaded that the will of God must ever mean the highest good of the creature. Simon Peter, on the other hand, preferred to trust to his own will and to his own idea of what

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was seemly and fitting. He savoured not the things of God, but the things of man. He had his own day-dreams of material aggrandisement, national exaltation, and political power. He was to be a great man, and his Master to rule over the nations with a rod of iron, and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel. These were the dreams that filled Simon Peter's mind, so that he had no room for the fellowship of the mind of Jesus Christ. And when Jesus began to open up His own purposes to him, he shrank from them with aversion.

Now here is our lesson. How can we follow Jesus if we are living for some other object than that for which Jesus lived? You, my dear brother, who seek after popularity; you, my dear sister, who are wishing to be on good terms with the world; and you whose great object in life is to secure the maximum of self-indulgence, how can you follow Jesus until you are in sympathy with Him and with His aims and purposes? Thus it is that the Master Himself has taught us, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." We have to deny ourselves in order to assert God. Self-assertion takes us out of fellowship with the mind of Christ, and thus shuts us off from all possibility of following Him; whereas the recognition of God and the according to Him of His proper position, which we may call God-assertion as opposed to self-assertion, introduces us into the mystery of the life of Christ, and renders it possible for us to follow Him.

And thus we are led on to our last answer to the question, "Why could not Simon Peter follow Jesus then?" We reply, Because in all probability, though he scarcely knew it, *he was inwardly clinging all the while to a besetting sin.* That besetting sin in his case appears to have been self-assertion, or self-confidence, mingled with not a little worldly pride. As I have already said, I suppose he was scarcely conscious of it; but it was there. We see this evil habit of soul exhibiting itself on various occasions, as though it lay just beneath the surface of his character—a root of bitterness ever ready to spring up and trouble him. We see it in his attempt to dissuade his Master from facing the cross; we see it in his conduct on this very occasion at the supper-table, when once and again he set up his own conceit and his own idea of what was fit against the mind of Christ. And this sorrowful experience of his should

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teach us that we can never cling to a besetting sin with one hand and grasp Jesus Christ with the other.

This consideration may serve to throw light upon a very large number of cases, where a very sensibly recognised barrier seems to shut the soul out from this happy experience of following Jesus. How many of you are kept back from following the Lord Jesus *now*, by some secret sin—some cherished sin which you are not prepared wholly to renounce and part company with? It may be a spiritual sin, as was that of Simon Peter, or it may be a sin which the world thinks lightly of—some folly or foible which your fellow-men are not disposed to judge harshly of; but none the less it comes between you and Jesus Christ, and succeeds in preventing you from following Him now. Or it may even be some gross and shameful sin which common morality condemns as much as your own heart. You know it is wrong, and yet you have been trying to play tricks with your own moral sense, and to juggle your own conscience.

But whatever may be the character of the sin, you are trifling and making compromises with the evil thing, instead of repudiating it and forsaking it once and for ever. Like Balaam, you are the victim of two conflicting emotions—the fear of God's wrath, the love of the wages of unrighteousness—such as they seem. You feel a certain reluctance to abjure for ever that which you none the less in your better moments deplore. "May I not make a league with this my pet infirmity or my besetting sin, and restrain it within a certain limit, saying to it, 'So far shalt thou go, and no further'? Why must I fight the battle of Hormah against it? Why mete out to it a complete and utter destruction? Is it absolutely necessary that I should have done with it altogether and for ever? Why really it is like parting with an old friend." Oh, child of God, dost thou know the price that thou art paying for this compromise? Thou art sacrificing for that evil thing, which thou knowest to be thy bane, the fellowship of Jesus, and all capacity to follow Him. Until thou art content to reckon thyself as dead indeed unto every known form of evil, whether thou thinkest it small or great, thou never canst follow Jesus.

Come, let us search ourselves to-day, just as if we had that keen searching gaze turned upon us which met Simon Peter but a little time after this, and broke his heart, and let us try and find out if we are trifling with any thing that God hates.

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Is it some habit of moral obliquity that brings condemnation upon your conscience, something wrong and crooked in your commercial transactions? Is it some habit of self-indulgence that you are yielding to, and that prevents you from presenting your body as a living sacrifice to the God to whom it belongs? Is it some unfriendly feeling towards a neighbour or acquaintance with whom you are not upon good terms for some reason or other, some bitter, rancorous recollections? Is it some unholy and impure affection that you feel winding its serpent-like coils around your moral nature, and holding you prisoner in a captivity that you have learnt to love, and with which you are not altogether willing to part company? Peradventure you shrink from gross and actual sin, and yet indulge in that which leads up to sin, forgetting how early in God's sight such sins may be perpetrated in the heart, long before any overt act of impurity has taken place, or even any apparent approach to such an act has been permitted. Oh, remember our God searches the heart, and tries the reins! You cannot follow Him to the cross while you are secretly trifling with that which crucified Him.

Or is it the very sin to which Simon Peter himself was addicted—the sin of self-seeking and self-assertion, the sin which disposes us to serve self much, while we profess to serve Christ a little? Are we burning incense to our own vanity, even while we profess to be occupied in the service of Christ the Lord, setting forth ourselves instead of Christ, seeking for ourselves popularity and distinction, while we profess to be working for the glory of our Lord? Are you anxious, my dear Christian worker, not only to please your heavenly Master, but also to win the approval of your Vicar, Sunday-school Superintendent, or fellow-teachers? Is there a double object, dear labourer, in your toil? are you ambitious to win the Well-done of man as well as the commendation of Jesus Christ? Oh, how these dead flies of corrupt motive make the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour! By these we are robbed of that purity which God demands of His children, and without which we cannot do His will or follow Him. And when we cling to these ambiguous motives, and these impure and unholy desires, a stern and inexorable "*cannot*" must still meet us in the midst of our best aspirations and attempts to go forward, and bar the way of progress—"Whither I go, ye cannot follow me now."

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Perhaps some of you, dear friends, are thinking that this is a very discouraging sermon, and saying, "Can we not follow Jesus without all that? Must we be brought down so very low, and feel our own weakness so much, and be always walking by faith? Must we be filled by the Spirit? Must we be in sympathy with the mind and feeling of Christ if we are really to walk with Him? Must we forsake the sin to which we are still clinging? It is asking a great deal. Can we not go to heaven without all this?" My brethren, we are not discussing the minimum qualification for heaven. What it is God only knows, and I am by no means ambitious to share His knowledge. We are talking of following Jesus, and that is far more to the purpose, it seems to me, than questioning as to what is the smallest amount of religion with which we may hope for heaven. I have no desire to solve the problem—and I hope I shall never attempt it—with how little religion it is possible for a man to get inside the gates of heaven. I do not think that a profitable speculation, and we had better leave it alone. But here is a consideration which is very profitable: How much spiritual benefit is it possible for a man to get out of his religion? How much of the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of peace is it possible for me to enjoy while I am here on earth? Is not that much better?

And when you complain that it seems there is a great deal to be done, and much to be given up, before you can rise to the prize of your high calling, I answer, "Be of good cheer; the end is worth gaining, and it is within your reach." Simon Peter did learn this lesson, and that very quickly, and you may learn it too. The disciple to whom his Master had said, "Whither I go thou canst not follow me now," a few short weeks after was following Jesus fully—with full devotion and full enjoyment of spiritual power and blessing. God can teach His lessons very quickly if we are willing and obedient, and determined to learn. But in order to learn we sometimes need to unlearn. And if my question this morning sets you thinking, and leads you to go home to your closet and distinctly face the inquiry, "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now?" I shall not have preached to you in vain.

Nay, we will not leave it till we get home to our closet, lest the impression of this moment should have passed away by that time. Let us ask the question now. The Master is here in our midst; His heart-searching gaze is fixed upon us now.



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Let me ask it of myself, and you ask it of yourselves, "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? If I have been lingering and loitering, and losing ground, Lord, why cannot I even now rise from my sin and folly and half-heartedness, and even now begin to follow Thee? Why cannot I? I who am bound to Thee by a stronger obligation than anything that Simon Peter knew of at this moment when this was said to him; I for whom the blood of Calvary was shed; I who am a child of the resurrection, and who might well be expected to know something of its power; I whose conscience has been freed from sin, and whose nature has been ransomed from death; I who understand the meaning of what seemed to Simon dark and enigmatical; I who have been crucified with Christ, buried in His grave, and begotten again unto a lively hope by His resurrection from the dead; Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now?"

I am no stranger to the glories of Pentecost; I know that the Holy Spirit has been given, and given for me; I have tasted of life through Him; He has borne witness within me, crying, Abba Father. Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I see Thee going forth in the power of Thy weakness, in the dignity of Thy humiliation, Leader of the host of martyrs, followed by the loyal and the true, who are content to count all loss for Thy dear sake. Lord, why cannot I follow Thee *now?*"

Yes, and let us lay special emphasis on that word *now*; for have we not too often deluded ourselves with good intentions? We mean to do better by-and-by; we will live closer to God, we will become imitators of Him; we will be more careful and circumspect. Ah, these good resolutions! how oft do they prove, when they have ended in a reiteration of failure, the very fulcrum on which Satan rests his argument of despair.

Better far that we should pause and ask ourselves, as in God's presence, "Lord, why should I dream of following Thee by-and-by? Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? What is there to hinder my beginning to set forth now on this high quest? What is the latent hindrance, the secret stumbling-block? Who is the Achan in the camp? Where is the wedge of gold, the Babylonish garment? Bring it forth, bring it forth to the light of day; bring it forth to the judgment of the cross!"

O revealing Spirit, search our hearts as with lighted candles,

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and whatever it be that mars the operation of Thy grace, and prevents us from listening to Thy call and following Thy steps, teach us how to put it away. Show us how to bury our Achan for ever in the grave of Jesus; and then do Thou turn our valley of Achôr into a door of Hope, and give us vineyards from thence, and teach us to sing as in the days of our youth, as in the days when we were brought out of the land of Egypt; to sing for very joy of heart while we press joyfully forwards to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. *Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now?"*

## “Follow Thou Me.”

“Follow thou Me.”—*John* xxi. 22.

IT will be in your memory that in our last discourse we were considering and endeavouring to answer the question, Why could not Simon Peter follow the Lord Jesus Christ at the time referred to in those words of our blessed Lord spoken at the last supper—“Whither I go thou canst not follow me now”? We were led to conclude that Simon Peter could not follow the Lord Jesus then; first, because he thought he could; and next, because he was walking by sight, rather than by faith; as the result of this, in the third place, because he was walking in the flesh, rather than in the Spirit; and as the result of this again, because he was walking out of sympathy and fellowship with Christ. There was yet a further consideration suggested to our minds, that probably Peter was at that very time clinging to a besetting sin, the sin of self-assertion and self-seeking; and the thought was brought before us that many of us are precluded from following Christ just because of some one particular sin that we are trifling with, and are reluctant to part company with. Where there is this disposition to make terms with sin, it is impossible for us to enter into the fellowship of Jesus’ life, or to follow Him fully.

You will also perhaps remember that I promised that we would consider the opposite question in our next sermon, How came it to pass that Simon Peter actually was enabled afterwards to follow his Master, and to follow Him so fully? for this inquiry seems a necessary and reasonable supplement to that which has already occupied us. And if the lessons suggested in our last address are of a kind to suggest deep heart-searchings, and perhaps much humiliation of soul before God, our present enquiry will, I hope, be found full of encouragement and comfort.

I cannot but regard this special call to Simon Peter as a

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distinct revocation, uttered by our blessed Lord, of that sentence of disability which He Himself had previously announced. At the supper table, before His passion, Christ had said to Simon Peter, "Thou canst not follow me now." Here, after the resurrection, by the sea of Galilee, the same voice bids the same disciple, "Follow thou me;" calling on him to do the very thing which before He had told him that he was unable to do.

What comfort there is for us all in this! We know that subsequently he did follow the Lord with wonderful fidelity and devotion. Hence we may gather, that we ourselves may have failed in following Jesus, and have come grievously short of our own expectation, and we may be thoroughly humiliated, distressed, and even despondent at the thought of our failures, and yet out of all this weakness He can raise us up into the glory of a life of power—a life in which, by His own grace, we shall be able to follow Him.

Nay, our blessed Lord, as it would appear to me, must have been looking forward to this time at the very moment when He pronounced the sentence of disability; for you remember He carefully goes on to say, "But thou shalt follow me afterwards." He was already looking on to the time when, through His resurrection, these carnally-minded men should become the children of the resurrection, and go forth possessed of true spiritual power, equipped and prepared to meet every emergency.

Dear friends, if our conscience, or if God's Holy Spirit acting on our consciences, indicates to any of us our inability to follow Jesus now; if we find ourselves standing face to face with a stern and terrible *cannot*, don't think that this is the key-note of despair, but rather the revelation of a wise and merciful discipline, by which we are to learn some of the most important of the great practical lessons of life. We are brought to know the full force of this sorrowful *cannot*, in order that in the very moment of the utter break-down and collapse of all our own resources, we may find the rainbow of promise span the portentous cloud of disappointment, and the impotence of the present introduce us into the better knowledge of Him who is to be the omnipotence of the future.

The question which we have to ask this morning is, as I have said, just the opposite of what we asked yesterday. It is no longer, "Why could not Simon follow Jesus then?" but,

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"How came it to pass that he was subsequently enabled to follow Jesus Christ so faithfully and well?" And to obtain our first answer, we must contemplate in our imagination that sorrowful scene outside the hall of the high priest. There we see Peter bowed in an agony of grief and shame, his breast heaving convulsively with sobs of passionate distress; while the bitter tears are gushing from his eyes. There he stands, lonely, desolate, heart-sick. Oh, what a break-down was there! All his self-confidence and self-sufficiency, what had become of them? The assurances he had given, even to the very last, that he was prepared to die for his Lord, what had become of them? The fruit of those three and a half blessed years of continual fellowship with the Master all seemed to be lost. The little progress which he had thought, perhaps, that he had made in grace and knowledge of God under the teaching of Christ seemed forfeited. The friendship with his fellow-disciples, and the love which bound them all together in a common affection for their Master, the smile of that Master's approbation, and the voice of His benediction, all alike seemed irreparably thrown away in one moment of weakness. It seemed to the heart-broken man that he had nothing left but the anguish of remorse and the horror and great darkness of despair. Where was he to go? what was he to do? how could he ever hope to reinstate himself in his lost position, or regain his self-respect? The fabric of his vain self-confidence was shattered to fragments, as by an earthquake shock, and the ruin of this house upon the sand was indeed great.

But, though he knew it not, in this complete overthrow, this utter ruin of all that he had built, this loss of all that he had plumed and prided himself upon, lay the very first step of all to a new and a higher and holier life; for death must ever come before resurrection, and the break-down of self before the manifestation of the power of God.

Do I speak to any in this congregation who have passed through a similar experience? They too have had their moments of bitter weeping over many a vow broken, many a solemn resolution only made to be forgotten. Such tears have been yours as Peter shed, when you have recalled your own weakness, and wondered at it, and felt so overwhelmed with shame and condemnation that you have nearly given all up for lost, and abandoned yourself to despair. Cheer up, my dear friend, Christ never breaks the bruised reed, nor quenches the



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smoking flax. Jesus saw those tears of Simon's, and He has heard us say, "Thou knowest, Lord, the sorrows of our heart. Shut not thy gracious ear to our prayer," and He never does and never will.

That moment of extreme darkness was the precursor of the dawn, the dawn of a new day to Simon Peter, and we too may hope to find, in our own experience, that they who sow in tears shall reap in joy. Little did Simon Peter think, as he stood there in his loneliness, sobbing for very anguish of heart, that this terrible fall was the first means that God was using to remove the barrier between him and his Master, and to render it possible for him to begin to follow Jesus. And yet so it was, and we at this distance of time can see that it was so. And little do we think, when we are thoroughly humbled before God, perhaps by some grievous fall, or perhaps by the convicting influences of the Holy Spirit, revealing inward evil and impurity where we had not known of the existence of any such thing, and stripping us of all our self-complacency—little, I say, do we think—that it is thus that He is preparing us to rise to a higher life, and enter upon the enjoyment of a new experience.

Oh, those bitter tears—those bitter tears! Better a thousand times that we should be saved them, if this may be. But if we cannot learn our first great negative lesson otherwise, better learn it thus than not learn it at all; for the lesson must be learnt, dear friends, ere we can follow Christ. Do I speak to any to-day who are thoroughly disheartened and downcast, scarce knowing where to look or what to do? Thank God amidst your tears, my dear friends, if He has swept away once and for ever all your confidence in yourself, stript you of your self-complacency, and taught you that if you are ever to win the battle it is He that must fight it in you. If this lesson be only well learnt, the sorrows of defeat shall yet prove the presage of victory.

But do not let us rest here. There is something more needed than tears of penitence, if we would rise from our falls to follow Christ, and this is brought before us in the next answer to our enquiry—How came Simon Peter to be able to follow Jesus? Let us contemplate another scene, of which indeed we have no description. Perhaps some of us are rather disposed to regret that this should have been so; but no doubt there was a reason why no record of it should be given. We

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only know that, after the resurrection, our Lord first sent a message to Simon, and then took an early opportunity of seeing Him alone. No human witness was allowed to hear what passed between the Lord and the disciple who had denied Him. We can only imagine what He said to Simon, and Simon to Him. Perhaps they did not say much to each other; looks may have spoken more eloquently than words, and the feelings on both sides may have transcended the powers of language.

I have sometimes thought, however, that there is a lesson in this silence. When a backsliding soul is restored to the conscious enjoyment of the favour and of the love of God, this experience is not, as it seems to me, a thing to be talked of. Better that its circumstances should be known only to the soul and its God. When first the newly-converted sinner approaches the cross he may well "tell his joys abroad" as the shepherds of Bethlehem did after the wonderful revelation of the Saviour. But when a backslider is restored through divine mercy, humility and contrition alike suggest the expediency of a certain amount of reticence. It seems more reasonable and natural that, if such speak at all of their experience, they should express grief and pain at the remembrance of their own sin and moral perfidy rather than enlarge upon any joy and rapture they may feel at their restoration.

But the very important truth which is impressed on our minds by this circumstance is, that before there can be any progress in grace, any real following Christ, there must needs be a complete and full restoration to Divine favour if the enjoyment of this has been forfeited. There are the two together once again, but really nearer to each other than ever before,—the once fallen disciple and his restoring Lord; and the disciple pours forth his confession in the Master's ear, and the Master speaks the word of forgiveness, and they are as one again.

I fear that here lies the explanation of the "*cannoi*" too often. Many of us cannot follow Jesus now, because we have not been thus fully restored from our falls. Perhaps we have backslidden, and have been living after the flesh instead of the Spirit, and there has sprung up a coldness between us and God; but we are awakened and stirred by some holier influence, and are led to set ourselves with a will to rise to higher things. (But we forget that there is something that has to be done first. Before we can follow Christ we have to take the place of a

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penitent to pour into His ear the confession of our coldness and backsliding.)

You remember the advice given to four out of the seven Churches of Asia in the book of Revelation—the four who had been most unfaithful. In each case the backsliding Church is called upon to *repent*. This is the first step towards improvement. Yes, let us get right back to the cross and pour out our confession there—cast ourselves afresh on the atoning work of Christ, pleading the sufficiency of the redemption which He has worked out for us. Then, and not till then, will you be in a position to hear the divine call—"Follow thou me," and to attempt to obey it.

This leads us on to a further answer to our enquiry—How came it to pass that Simon was able to follow Christ after all? We answer, Because he had been brought into close contact with the risen Saviour. Not only had he heard the pardoning voice of the Master he had sinned against and denied, and had thus been restored to favour, but he had gazed on the risen Christ. Imagine what the effect of this upon him must have been! How all his gross mundane and carnal views of Christ would be dissolved! Christ stands before him now in the glory of His spiritual nature as one whose kingdom is not of this world. And though perhaps Simon scarcely knows what has happened to him, unconsciously, by contact with the risen One, he has become a child of the Resurrection.

Let us too, dear friends, remember that if we would follow Jesus, it is necessary that we should gaze not only on the story of His human life, not only contemplate His cross, and see our redemption wrought out there, but above all things it is necessary that we should apprehend Him as our risen Saviour, and see in His resurrection a pledge of our own resurrection life! We may gaze upon the human life of Christ and yet get no further than the ethics of Christianity; we may contemplate the crucifixion, and yet only kindle the moral sentiments of Christianity; but to become acquainted with a risen Saviour—to know Him as our present life, is to become possessed of the spiritual power of Christianity, and by this we are to be raised to the proper level of the spiritual life, and to walk on our high places as those who are alive from the dead.

For the effects of the death of Jesus Christ considered apart from His resurrection may be described as mainly negative—the destruction of the old rather than the introduction to the

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new. The positive benefits of redemption seem all to flow from the resurrection, and to be connected with the Person of the risen Christ. This same St. Peter tells us that we are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ," and we cannot peruse his own epistles without seeing what a wonderful change the resurrection had made in him. Heavenly-mindedness and true spirituality are the leading characteristics of those epistles, written by the man whose head and heart were once so full of carnal dreams of worldly ambition. He seems now to be living in sight, as it were, of the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." He regards all things around him as doomed to be dissolved, and he lives in the expectation of that new heaven and that new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. He who had resented the idea of suffering, now rejoices at being partaker of the sufferings of Christ; he who had proved the weakness and insufficiency of all human resolution, and of all mere natural courage, now glories in the thought of being kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

My dear friends, it is not mere sentimental admiration for the character of Christ that will enable us to follow Him. That is not unlike the knowing Christ after the flesh of which St. Paul speaks in those memorable words, "Yea, also if we have known Christ after the flesh, yet from henceforth know we Him no more." Nor is it mere gratitude for His death, or the love that may be kindled by the thought of all that we owe Him, that will suffice for this purpose. We need to know, and to know more and more fully, the power of His resurrection. We need to see ourselves raised in that resurrection into new and wondrous relations with God in the risen One; to see ourselves not only cut off from the old, but introduced into full connection with the new, and therefore in a position to hold constant spiritual intercourse with the unseen, to walk in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, as those who are alive from the dead.

And when we take this, our true position, not as a matter of theory, but as in the spirit of true faith, it then becomes possible for us to follow Jesus, as otherwise we could never even have hoped to do. For in that He liveth, He liveth unto God, and we thus learn to regard ourselves as "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Yet another step towards the removal of all incapacity to

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follow Jesus was taken in the administering of that gentle discipline to which the disciple was subjected on this occasion, and in the stamping on his heart of the great lesson that accompanied it. It must have been no small trial to Simon to have his love for his Master three times called in question. No wonder that Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time—"Lovest thou me?" But this thrice-repeated questioning would seem to have been a thrusting of the probe once more into a scarce closed wound. Simon Peter was wise in appealing to His Lord's knowledge of himself rather than to his own self-consciousness, and we shall find it well to imitate him here.

But along with these great searchings of heart there comes the double lesson which we all have to learn if we would follow Jesus. First, that true love does not exist as a mere passive emotion, but must ever express itself in unselfish benevolence towards others; and, second, that true love entails self-surrender, and the submission of the human will to the Divine.

The first of these lessons many Christians are slow to learn, and hence they cannot follow Jesus. How frequent a thing it is to be consulted by Christians who complain that they seem unable to make any sort of progress, and then to find upon enquiry that they are leading a selfish and useless life, while souls are perishing all around, and their own neighbours and acquaintance are starving for lack of gospel bread!

Some Christians seem to hear the question—"Lovest thou me?" and repeat it over and over until they form a habit of morbid and dreary introspection, and waste their lives in torturing their own self-consciousness, instead of making over such enquiries to the Master Himself as Simon Peter did. But they never seem to hear the second utterance—"Feed my sheep," or certainly they do not act upon it if they hear it. Hence they cannot follow Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. Simon Peter seemed from that time forward to be filled with the Master's Spirit in this respect, and so much true pleasure did he feel in this work that years afterwards we find him passing on the call to others in almost the same words as had been used to him, as if to show us how well he remembered the lesson given by the lake of Galilee—"The elders amongst you I exhort, . . .



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Feed the flock of God which He hath purchased with His own blood." The dream of personal ambition has been supplanted by a holy enthusiasm for the good of others, which was really the Master's Spirit infused into the servant. And we, dear brethren, must learn to prove our love in the same way if we do indeed desire to follow that Master, who, when on earth, went about doing good, and healing all that were possessed of the devil, for God was with Him.

But the second lesson is a much harder one to learn, and one that nothing but love can teach us, and one, on the learning of which, or, at any rate, upon our willingness to learn it, our ability to follow Jesus, so far as we ourselves are concerned, must in the main depend. It is the great life-lesson of the surrender of the human will to the Divine. It is not a lesson that can be learned in a day; but it is no small point gained when we recognize it as a lesson that has to be learned, and cheerfully set ourselves to work to learn it. Then it does become possible for us to follow Jesus; for you will remember we are taught of Him that He *learned* obedience by the things which He suffered.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee," exclaims the Master to the disciple whose love He has just been subjecting to so rigorous a scrutiny, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and wentest whither thou wouldest: but when thou art old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." So the love that was referred to the Master's judgment was found in His divine foreknowledge to stand the test even of a martyr's death, and the prophetic vision of his Lord traced out at a glance the course of His disciple's career until He saw his distant future crowned with another Calvary. Ah! it was true indeed, gloriously true; and what comfort for Simon Peter, if he could but have understood it. The once-fallen Apostle was to follow his Lord after all; to follow Him all the way, through evil report and good report, until he too should glorify God by a martyr's death upon a felon's cross.

But now let us look at these words, and find in them a condition of the faithful following of Jesus. Here are two modes of life and forms of experience brought into contrast with each other. The life of spiritual youth, in which, although we love the Lord, we gird ourselves and go whither we will; and the life of spiritual maturity, when we simply stretch out our hands

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in cheerful submission, and another girds us and carries us whither we would not. All Christian life has its younger days, and these are frequently characterized by not a little activity, and sometimes by no small amount of impulsiveness and self-will. Young Christians for the most part gird themselves, and make up their minds to do what they please to do. Some things commend themselves to their fancy, and these they elect to undertake; while other things are repulsive, and from these they shrink.

So with Simon in his early days. There were some things in his relations to Christ which commended themselves to his feelings. On one occasion he boasted of having left all to follow Jesus. I don't suppose in itself he would have felt this leaving all less than other people, but there was a sort of heroism and chivalry about the man that made such sacrifices for the sake of One whom he loved so dearly, nothing less than a pleasure; and while he shared the privations, it was no small matter to him to feel that he was also to share the glories of his Master. But it was a very different thing when he was called by that Master to contemplate the cross, and to look forward to humiliation, suffering, and shame as the end of such a career.

Is it not even so with us in our early days? There are some forms of religious service which entail no considerable amount of hardship, and don't involve anything like serious self-sacrifice; and when we are young we gird ourselves, and select such forms of work as promise most gratification to our natural tastes and feelings. Don't let us blame young Christians or judge them harshly; the Lord does not. Let them exercise what powers and gifts, whether natural or spiritual, they may possess, and do the best they can with them. Let them set themselves to their work, and throw all their enthusiasm into the business of their new life. But the Lord has deeper lessons for them to learn by-and-by, when they begin to ripen. Hereafter, if they abide in His school, they will shrink from girding themselves any more; they will no longer go whither they please, shape their own course, and obey their own propensities. They will have to learn to stretch forth their hands and allow themselves to be girded by another, and carried whither they would not.

To Simon Peter, with his impetuous and uncurbed nature, this must have seemed a hard lesson to learn; but he soon

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began to learn it. He soon had to stretch forth his hands and be girded, and led whither he would not. It was all very delightful to preach at Pentecost and win three thousand souls; but it was not so pleasant to be dragged before the rulers, and to be threatened with the direst penalties, if he preached in the name of Jesus any more. It was not contrary to his inclination to exercise marvellous gifts of healing, but it was another thing to be publicly beaten. It was a blessed task to raise a Dorcas from her death-sleep, but it was a different matter to lie bound between four soldiers in Herod's prison. It was just what he liked, to preach the gospel to the Jews; but he would, no doubt, have much preferred that some one else should carry it to the Gentiles. But Another still girded him, and sent him where he would not; and still he learnt to "stretch forth his hands" "in full and glad surrender."

And so he was educated and prepared for that last solemn girding, by which he was bound as to the horns of the sacrificial altar—that martyr's death which set the crown upon a martyr's life. Another girded him. To the outward eye, it seemed to be a rude and heartless Roman soldier that drew the unkindly girdle round him, and led him whither he would not; but when we look again, we see no more the cruel executioner. The hand that had girded him for the sacrifice of a life-time now girded him for a martyr's last battle and a martyr's victory, and, while he obediently stretched forth his hands, enabled him, as by his life so also by his death, to glorify God.

Yes, that hand had girded him all the way; and only they who are girded by it can do what Simon Peter did—follow Jesus; and we too, if we also would follow Him, must learn to stretch out our hands, and let ourselves be girded by that Other and carried whither we would not. "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." Oh, it is a long, strange, hard lesson! but let us comfort ourselves with the thought the Master Himself found it hard to learn, and only learnt it fully in Gethsemane; and so He must needs feel for us, His younger brethren, and know how we shrink from what seems like the shadow of the cross. But let us not be afraid so long as it is our Father that girds us. He loves us too dearly to be indifferent to our interests. If He carries whither we would not, let us remember He is all the time carrying us whither He wills; and the Father's will in this matter is one with His Son's, who said,

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"Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory, the glory that thou gavest me before the foundation of the world." Oh, let us not fear the will of God ! It may mean the cross ; it must mean the crown. It may bring us to our Gethsemane ; it must lead us to Olivet, and the mount of the Ascension. It may carry us to our Calvary ; but it must bring us at last to the courts of Zion, the city of vision and of peace.

The great lesson of life, dear Christian friends, is the surrender of the creature will to the Divine. He has learned the lesson best who has most confidence in the will of God. Doubt that will, and you may be a Stoic, you cannot be a martyr. Believe in it, and the martyr's spirit is already yours, and by-and-by the martyr's crown. For what is a martyr but a witness—a witness not merely that there is a God, but that His will is good, and perfect, and acceptable, and therefore to be accepted at any cost as the law of our highest well-being?

"Ill that Thou blestest is but good,  
And unblessed good is ill ;  
And all is right that seems most wrong,  
If it be Thy sweet will."

But be not impatient, if the lesson takes us long to learn. We begin to say as little children, "Our Father which art in heaven . . . *thy will be done.*" Long years have passed away, and still we have to learn what that prayer means and how to pray it properly. Happy we if, even when we are old, we shall have learned to let no hand gird us but His, that He may carry us whither He will, and, in life or death, enable us to glorify God.

But when we accept this cheerfully as our life-law, although the lesson may as yet be only very partially learned, we are now willing to be emptied, and therefore we can be filled ; and so this brings us to our next answer to this question, How came Simon Peter to be able to follow Jesus after all ? And we reply, Because being now given over and surrendered to God, God could fill him with the Holy Ghost ; and herein lay the great positive cause of the change in the man, the cause of the contrast between the Simon of the Gospels and the Simon of the Acts. Already he was prepared to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost. He is now emptied of self-love, self-will, and self-confidence, and he is in the very attitude of self-surrender.

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Hence God can fill him. By-and-by the day of Pentecost has come, and the tongues of fire descend. Simon, whose lips had denied his Lord, who had quailed before the challenge of a servant girl, stands now before the rulers of his nation with unquivering lip, and bears testimony before all to his Master, to His claims, and to the position which he occupied in the economy of God's universe; and when the rulers saw the boldness of this man, who had once played the coward, they took knowledge of him that he had been with Jesus.

Even so, if we would follow the Lord Jesus fully, we need that baptism of the Holy Ghost and power which Simon felt. And we may have it. The conditions of receiving it would seem to be, first of all, the loss of all confidence in our own resources; and next, the surrender and submission of our will to the Divine will—in the spirit of readiness to be ruled and girded by Another; and third, the quiet believing, waiting upon God for power from on high. This baptism of power may come in different ways. It may perhaps fall upon some of us on some notable occasion, even as it came on the disciples at Pentecost, or more gradually it may fill our heart with a strange sense of holy calm and the possession of grace sufficient for our day. Or it may come upon us at the moment of action or of need, enabling us to do or bear what otherwise would be beyond us. There is nothing stereotyped in His operations, but they are real and actual; and would to God we knew more of them in our own experiences!

Why are we not filled? Surely it is the will of God that we should be? It must be, then, because we are not willing to be emptied, or because we shrink from full self-surrender; or, peradventure, because we are too impatient, and grow weary of waiting upon Him. But let us bear in mind that, as it was through the eternal Spirit that Jesus offered Himself, it is only through that same Spirit that we shall be able to *follow Jesus* in offering ourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.

Thus, my dear friends, we are led on as by a necessary inference to our last answer to the question, How came Simon Peter to be able to follow Jesus after all? We reply, Because, by the power of Jesus's resurrection, and by the entrance of the Holy Ghost into his nature, and by the afflatus of that Divine Spirit, he was lifted up into the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and lived and walked as a citizen of the new



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Jerusalem. Do you think he lost a great deal by giving up his will to God, and renouncing his old life of self-assertion and self-gratification? Do you think he was happier before than afterwards? happier when the rebel will was unsubdued, and he girded himself, than when he surrendered himself, and Another girded him?

Turn to his own Epistle, and you shall get an answer. He sits down to address his fellow-Christians, and has scarcely begun to write before he feels his heart all aglow, and breaks forth in words of joyful praise: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he exclaims, "which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice *with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*"

Look! he is living in heavenly places now, far above the worldly aims and self-seeking projects which actuated him once, and he is enjoying the very atmosphere of heaven, and Christ has become to him more and more the very life he lives. As he has been willing to follow his Master through the trial of faith to which all loyal servants must be exposed, so he is allowed already to taste something of a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. Do not say that he made too great a sacrifice in stretching forth his hands to be girded by Another. Do not say that he lost by permitting himself to be emptied, that he might be so divinely filled. Do not say that he forfeited too much when he gave up the earthly life for the heavenly. Surely thus to lose our life is to find it, and to find our life in any other way, what is it but to lose it?

And the same voice that fell on Simon's ear upon the shore of the lake of Galilee is sounding still. Loyal hearts and true can still hear the Master calling, "Follow thou me." To-day methinks Christ is passing through this church. To-day He

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is standing before us, though we don't see Him. The cross is on His shoulder, the thorny crown on His brow, the scars of Golgotha on His sacred body. Now He turns His face upon us, and those kind eyes seem to look us through and through.

Perhaps He sees some of us weeping over past failures and miserable shortcomings; but still He calls us: "Follow thou me. I am going a long way, all the way from earth to heaven; I am going, through good report and evil report, through loss and through gain, through trial and prosperity, in the path of the Father's will, that sweet and holy will which is always good and perfect and acceptable. I want companions in my journey. Friends, blood-bought followers, come along, follow me. Take your cross on your shoulder. Don't be afraid that it will crush you: as your day so shall your strength be.

"Don't follow man, or measure yourself by this minister or the other. Come along, rising higher and higher, drawing nearer and ever nearer—nearer to heaven to-day than you were yesterday—becoming more like God now than you were a week ago. Come, ye ransomed ones, ye children of the resurrection, follow me all along your earthly way until I lead you Home and present you before my Father and your Father on His throne in Zion. Follow me in my way of sorrow, and by-and-by you shall swell the glories of my train, and follow me in my triumphal progress in fairer worlds on high."

What shall we answer Him? Thank God there are some, at any rate, who respond to His call, and press forward in His train. And they go from strength to strength, until at length we lose sight of the wondrous procession in the light of the dawn of the new day. When next we see them earth has passed away with all its pomps and pageants, and a new world of glory is opened up before us, and there we behold them following Him still. The fellowship of time has become the union of eternity. There they are, nearer and nearer still. "These are they that are redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb; these are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." Wouldst thou follow Him yonder, my brother, in the glory? Then listen to His voice, that falls upon thy ear to-day, "Follow thou me."

## Martha ;

### OR, THOUGHTS ON THE ACTIVE LIFE.

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village : and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house."—*Luke* x. 38.

THE name of Martha suggests to the minds of most of us, I fancy, the thought of an anxious, troubled, and perhaps a somewhat fussy woman, with a short temper and a hasty tongue. That I think is the picture that many of us have drawn of Martha in our own minds. But you must remember that there is something to be said on the other side, something to be said on Martha's behalf ; and while we do not shut our eyes to Martha's faults, we may learn something from that which is recorded to her credit.

Now here we have it said that "a certain woman named Martha received Jesus into her house." I gather that Martha was probably the ruling spirit of the household. She was very likely the elder sister, and Mary, a person of gentle character, was very much, I daresay, in the habit of submitting to her implicitly ; and Lazarus, probably also her junior, very likely may have been equally under her influence. I have no doubt Martha was a vigorous, strong-minded person, and a woman of that kind, if she had set her face against receiving Jesus into her house, would have made it very difficult indeed for the others to have adopted an opposite course. I mean to say that Mary and Lazarus would have found it very difficult to welcome Jesus into their home, if Martha had set her face against it. And even if they had been so audacious as to invite Christ into their house in spite of their sister's opposition, Martha could have made things very uncomfortable indeed for Him, and I don't think Jesus would have repeated the visit.

Happily it was otherwise. Martha herself, the managing spirit of the household, is the person who invites the Lord Jesus Christ to come and take His abode for a season in her house. And in doing so, she not only finds a benefit for

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herself, but she also is the means of benefiting her brother and sister, and both Lazarus and Mary owed their sister a great debt of gratitude on this account. Mary would never have had the opportunity of sitting at Jesus' feet, or of anointing them with the precious ointment, if Martha had not first invited Him ; and Lazarus would never have been privileged to become the friend of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and to enjoy His love, unless his sister had been prepared to give the Saviour a warm and hearty welcome.

Nay, we may say more than this. Not only did that brother and sister owe a debt of gratitude to Martha, but I think the whole Church of Christ owes a debt of gratitude to her ; for had she declined to receive the Lord, certain touching and most instructive incidents would probably never have occurred, from which throughout the whole course of Christian history the Church of Christ has derived so much consolation and help. For it was because Martha willingly and cheerfully received Jesus into her house that we are in possession of the lessons contained in three most instructive incidents of our Lord's ministry. The first is that which lies before us in this passage ; the second, that in which Jesus performed His last great miracle at Lazarus' tomb, revealing Himself to all mankind, and not only to those astonished mourners, as the Resurrection and the Life ; the third, that in which Mary's prophetic love led her to anoint her Lord for His burial. Those of us who value the specially precious lessons connected with these three incidents must I think feel that we all owe a great debt to Martha.

And here let me say that it is a happy thing when a strong mind and a vigorous will are turned in the right direction, and employed for the right purpose. It is something to be thankful for if we have such qualities as a strong mind and a vigorous will to present to the Lord for His service ; and although these are not unfrequently coupled with an ungentleness and hastiness which are not altogether lovely, nay, may sometimes be repulsive and painful, yet let us acknowledge the fact that God can utilize that element in our temperament which Satan seeks to abuse, and that where a strong will and a vigorous determination may be employed by the devil with the worst possible results, such natural characteristics, dedicated to the service and glory of God, may prove of priceless value.

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Now we must remember that Martha had to face a good deal in inviting Jesus Christ into her household. The test was a severe one to her, because it was to try her in her weakest point. There were thirteen hungry men to be provided for, and then no doubt some of the neighbours would also be expecting an invitation to meet this Jesus, who had come among them, and about whom there was so much talk. There was not only the expense of preparing for so many guests, but there would be all the trouble and the fuss, which would quite upset the household for a long time to come. Would it not be better to make some other arrangement? Would not a charitable gift to Jesus, which might enable Him to provide Himself and His disciples with the necessities of life for a season elsewhere—would not that do just as well? An anxious, careful woman like Martha might naturally have been expected to foresee all sorts of difficulties in carrying out such an arrangement; it was just the sort of thing most likely to upset her, and she might easily have worked herself into a fever of anxiety at the bare thought of such an intrusion upon the quiet course of domestic life at Bethany. No doubt Martha had taken account of all she would have to do, and all the inconveniences that she would have to put up with, and having done so, she makes up her mind that the thing is worth doing, and that it must be done at all costs and hazards.

Perhaps, too, there may have been other unpleasant consequences that she may have had to think about. Jesus Christ not unfrequently may have seemed a troublesome guest, in other ways besides those that I have referred to. His presence may sometimes have exposed people to an amount of hostile criticism and censure which they would fain have avoided. Martha and Mary seem to have had a good many friends, some of whom when Lazarus died came down from Jerusalem to comfort them. I gather that many of those friends were probably not believers in Jesus Christ; nay, were possibly bitterly opposed to Him. For even after that wondrous miracle some of these appear to have gone straight to the Pharisees with an account of all that had happened, and it was their report which led to that memorable meeting of the national council, at which Caiaphas tendered his worldly-wise advice, which led ultimately to our Lord's arrest and crucifixion.



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No doubt then many of those friends of hers would be disposed to think very unfavourably of her for taking in this prophet of Galilee, and she would have to bear their remonstrances, and perhaps their reproaches, or worse still, their slanders. "This is very discreditable to our good friend Martha," we can imagine them saying. "Here she is identifying herself with this strange prophet of Nazareth, whom we know nothing good about, and whom all the highest authorities of the period regard as a shameless impostor, a most unsatisfactory person for her to have any dealings with." I dare say many spoke of Christ then with as great contempt as the world exhibits towards His followers in the present day. So it seems reasonable to suppose that Martha had to face the possibility of adverse criticism, and even of censure and scorn. And yet she would not be deterred. One thing is clear, she was a brave woman, whatever faults she may have had. It required a good deal of moral courage to invite this much-maligned and much-abused Man into her house, and to treat Him as a loved and honoured guest. But Martha's courage was equal to the occasion.

And, my dear friends, we too shall find it no light matter to receive Jesus into our hearts and into our homes. And it is as well that we should clearly understand what the consequences may be if we take so important a step. He Himself tells us what we may expect as the effect of His presence in our homes: "Suppose ye," He says, "that I am come to send peace into the world? I tell you nay—but rather division; for from henceforth a man's foes shall be they of his own household." Yes, His presence may cause us a good deal of trouble now, as it did then, and may expose us to no small amount of hostile criticism; for it not unfrequently happens that when Christ is received into the household, the habits and customs that previously prevailed in the household will have to be reconsidered and revised.

The question will have to be asked over and over again, "Is this and that in accordance with the mind of Him whom we have received and welcomed as our guest?" for we must bear in mind that wherever Christ goes He declines to occupy a subordinate position. He brings authority with Him; He represents the sovereign claims of God; He is not content to be a mere passing guest. If He enters the household, you must arrange the household in accordance with His ideas and

desires ; and the ideas and desires of Christ are often different from those of the world, and of many whom He deigns to visit. And so it comes to pass that a great many things have to be reconsidered and remodelled ; many things we were in the habit of doing we can do no longer, and many things we were in the habit of leaving undone we can no longer leave undone.

All this may cause a good deal of turmoil and stir, and may seem to upset the peace of the household for a time ; nay even this may not be all that has to be faced if we are determined to receive Jesus Christ into our households. On this occasion Martha happily was not separated from either Lazarus or Mary by her decision in this matter. Happily they were all of one mind in the house, and her brother and sister were quite as willing and ready to receive Christ as she was ; but, alas ! this is not always so. It sometimes happens that a person who invites Christ into the household finds He is very far from welcome to the other members of it. Your own brothers and sisters mayhap do not greet Him cordially. They rather look askance at Him, as if He were an intruder ; and so sometimes the presence of the Prince of Peace causes something akin to warfare in the domestic circle, and induces variance between those who had previously been bound together by the closest earthly relationships. Cruel things may be said and done by those who once seemed all gentleness and affection, and the tranquil harmony of domestic life may seem to have been forfeited.

Now this may perhaps appear to some a high price to pay even for the presence of Christ ; but let us look at the other side of the question. Reflect for a moment upon the honour that was thus conferred upon Martha. She had the privilege of doing what neither Mary nor Lazarus could have done, or would have done, without her consent ; she had the privilege of receiving Jesus into her house. Whatever blessings flowed to Mary and Lazarus, they came through this good deed of Martha's in receiving Jesus into her house. And I would have you reflect a moment upon the honour and privilege that is offered to you, dear friends, in this particular respect. It is possible for some of you to do what Martha did. You may be the means of introducing Jesus Christ into your household ; and although His presence may cause a disturbance, just think what an honour it is to be the means of

introducing the King of kings and Lord of lords into the household which belongs to Him, but which has not previously recognised His claims. Think of the beneficent results that may flow from your action—how the purifying and elevating influences of the Divine Presence may reach one person after another, until at last you can look around with holy joy, and exclaim, “As for me and my house we now serve the Lord.”

Not long since, at the close of a mission that I had conducted in the North of England, a gentleman, a man of property, returned to his country house, from the large town where I was working, a changed man. On his arrival he summoned into his dining-room all his household, servants and all; and standing up before them all, he addressed them to this effect: “My dear friends, I have to confess with shame and sorrow that this has not been hitherto a Christian household. It has not been regulated upon Christian principles. I, as your master, have not been setting you a Christian example; but, on the contrary, all my influence has been thrown into the wrong scale. I cannot express the amount of sorrow I feel as I look back over the past. But I have called you all together to tell you that, through God’s mercy, a great change has taken place in me, and now my supreme desire is that this household should be a Christian household, and that all that is done in it should be done just as the Lord would have it done.” Turning to the butler he said, “We have never hitherto had family prayers; but now understand that at such an hour in the morning, and such an hour in the evening, you ring the bell, and we will all gather together and acknowledge God in our family.” And he added, “Be sure you make no difference; whoever may be in the house, whether they be worldly or whether they be religious people, make no distinction. From this time forth Jesus Christ must be Master in this household; we have ignored and dishonoured Him too long.”

It must have needed some courage, no doubt, to make such a declaration as that. But, oh! do you not think he had his reward in the joy and satisfaction he must have felt as he knelt for the first time, surrounded by his family, at the feet of a reconciled God, and thus publicly received Jesus into his house? And remember you may be the means of introducing Christ into your household, even if you be not at its head. The humblest member of the family, or even one of the servants, may be the means of bringing Christ in, and by-and-by

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the influence and effect of His presence may be recognized and felt by all.

Dear friends, do you think Martha ever regretted receiving Jesus Christ into her house? Do you think she regretted it, even when she was worried and flurried by the cares and pressure of occupation that His advent brought along with it? I will answer for it that, whatever else she may have found fault with, she never found fault with herself for bringing all this turmoil upon herself by receiving Jesus. You may be sure that at each fresh visit she learnt to love Him more and more, and to value His presence as the very thing she needed to correct her faults, and to calm and soothe her amidst the necessary frictions of life. I suppose that to her dying day there was nothing that she thanked God for more than this, that she had been led by the Holy Spirit to receive Jesus Christ into her house. Now let me ask you, before we go any further, Have you taken this step? Have you received Jesus into your house, you who are heads of households? Have you welcomed Him, and bid Him take the first place? Is it your object so to order your households, that His influence may be felt in everything?

Martha received Jesus, but little did she know, when she did so, how soon she was to stand in terrible need of His sympathy and comfort and help! A cloud was gathering over that happy home, and by-and-by the tempest broke. That first happy visit came to an end, and the months slid by in the quiet routine of home-life, and then the day of trial came. Lazarus lay dead; the light of their domestic life seemed extinguished for ever, and the whole world seemed desolate and blighted, and their hearts sank within them under the cruel weight of a great sorrow. Oh, the bitter tears that Martha and Mary shed as they bent their last fond look on their brother's face, and then followed the bier to the sepulchre, where they poured out their last farewell, and came away to their lonesome home with bleeding hearts!

And in that hour of anguish and distress to whom did their thoughts turn? To the Man whom Martha had received. I can fancy, as they sat watching long hours by that bedside, the one thought that would be constantly recurring to their minds must have been, "Won't the Master come? He must know of our distress. Won't He save us from this terrible calamity? He always seemed to love us. Won't

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He prove a true Friend to us now in the hour of need? But why does He not come? The long hours creep slowly away, and still Jesus does not appear. Oh, if He were here our brother would not die!" And then when the funeral was over, and the first intensity of the anguish had passed away, a rumour reaches them of His approach. Martha hears it. The Master is coming, and Martha, with her natural impulsiveness, rushes out to meet Him, and salutes Him with the words which had been rising in her heart over and over again all the time—"Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died."

And there He stands gazing at her—oh, how tenderly!—and she hears Him groaning in His troubled spirit. Mary has joined them now, and tears are flowing fast all round, and His eyes are dry no longer. Oh, what a moment it must have been for Mary and Martha when they knew that He who loved them so truly was weeping as with their tears, and sharing their sorrow! "*Jesus wept;*" and the friends around said, as well they might, "Behold, how He loved him!" Another moment and Jesus was standing by the closed tomb, lifting up His heart in that wonderful prayer, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." They stood looking on, wondering what was to come next. Then was heard the voice of power, "Lazarus, come forth," and he that was dead came forth. The king of terrors yields his prey and gives back his victim to the glories of a new, a resurrection life. There he stands before them, the very Lazarus that they had lost, their own dearly loved brother still. Oh, what a moment it was when the man whom they had mourned as dead clasped his sisters to his bosom! One can imagine the joy too deep for words that filled their hearts and welled up in their brimming eyes, while He who was the resurrection and the life looked on, smiling on all the ecstasy which He had caused. Did Martha lose anything by receiving Jesus into her house?

And shall we lose anything if we receive Him too? Shall we ever have to regret it? I suppose that, sooner or later, trouble comes to us all. The blinds fall; the sun is darkened in our sky. It may be that our dearest earthly treasure is snatched from us, and the world looks dreary. What do we need in such an hour above everything else? Surely it is the Master's presence, and the knowledge of His sympathy. To lie at the feet of the Christ while He reveals Himself unto



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us as the Resurrection and the life, and in that great Temple of Sorrow where, as it has been so well said, He Himself is the High Priest, to be received into the fellowship of His own suffering, and thus to be prepared for participation in His own glory. Oh, this is indeed to reap in joy where we have sown in tears!

I remember once, when passing through a great sorrow, being much helped by a letter that I received from a dear Christian brother. "I would say to you, my dear friend," he observed, after a few words of sympathy, "in this your sore trouble, Put Christ Himself in the place that He has Himself made vacant." I remember years ago losing a dear little sister, to whom I was passionately attached, and in my sorrow it seemed to me as if Christ assumed to me the form of a little innocent child, all gentleness and affection, and I found myself ever dwelling upon those features in His character which savoured most of all that is attractive and lovely in childhood. Some little time after I had another bereavement. I lost my dear father, a father to whom I had ever been accustomed to look up for guidance and direction, on whose judgment I had always leaned, and whose example I had sought to imitate; and once again it seemed to me as if Jesus Himself, in my heart's experience, stepped into the place that He had made vacant, and to me He seemed such as Isaiah describes Him, "Wonderful, Counsellor, The everlasting Father," a Friend on whose judgment I could lean, and whose example was to be my guide—gentle still, but strong in His gentleness; innocent and pure, but wise in His innocence. Thus He is to us what we have lost until we begin to find a certain wondrous gain even in our losses.

Ah, dear friends, sweet are such uses of such adversity as this! blessed are the sorrows that bring out such new and fresh revelations of our wealth in Christ! It is only this that can make our sorrows fruitful of good. Without this sorrow must remain barren of any real profit. Nay, St. Paul was right when he went so far as to say, "The sorrow of the world worketh death." Oh, it is more than sad when we see the children of this world emerging from their season of trial soured and embittered, petulant and discontented, devoid of comfort and devoid of hope! But it is otherwise with those whom sorrow brings to the feet of Jesus. What light His presence throws on the mystery of sorrow, while it reveals to

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us that it is after all only a thin veil that hides the world of glory from the world of pain and sorrow, in which for a short time our lot is cast. If He do not now bring back our dear ones from the grave, He leads us on in thought and hope to the glories of that resurrection morning, where all shall be restored to us, and we to all them; and thus He casts "the roseate hues of early dawn"—the true dawn—upon the dark thunder-clouds of our distress. And when our supreme moment of trial comes, and heart and flesh shall fail us, shall we regret that we have received Jesus into our heart and home then?

Oh, my friends, if there is one thing that will calm us and sustain us as we ourselves pass through the valley of the shadow of death, one thing that will cause us to rejoice even amidst bodily suffering, one thing that will enable us to triumph even amidst the break-down of all our natural powers, surely it will be the thought that we have received Jesus, first into our hearts, and then into our homes, and that He has been our travelling companion all our journey through, and will never forsake us at that journey's end. Then as we have welcomed Him into *our* homes, so we know He will welcome us into His. "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." As we were not ashamed to welcome Him, and to give Him the place of honour here on earth, so He will not shrink from welcoming us up yonder with His "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Nay, He will rejoice to present us as His brethren before the throne, and confess us before His Father and His holy angels. Oh, my dear friends, how small will all the trials and inconveniences that His presence may have entailed appear in that bright hour of wondrous compensation!

But it is time that we should look at the other side. So far we have been saying all we could in Martha's favour, but we must not shut our eyes upon her faults; for there is much to be learned from considering the faults and failings even of those whose hearts are in the right place, if we approach the consideration of these in the spirit of charity and humility. It is evident that Martha got some harm as well as some good out of Jesus' visit; for she seems here to be sadly flustered and flurried, and even somewhat peevish and irritable. She seems indeed to have been out of temper with the Master as

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well as with her sister, and to have implied some little reproach on Him as well as on Mary. But why all this disturbance and irritation? Surely it all came of this, that she was thinking more of serving Christ than of pleasing Him. If she had paused to reflect, she must have seen that a sharp, half-reproachful word, and the obvious loss of composure and temper, would cause the Master a good deal more pain than the best-served meal in the world could give Him pleasure. She was busy about Christ, but she failed to enter into sympathy with Christ. She waited upon Him outwardly, but she did not understand how to minister to His inmost Spirit; and so even while inviting and welcoming Christ into her household, she forfeited that peace and calm which it is Christ's joy to bring to His own.

Here we have a very important lesson taught us, and one that we need to have impressed upon our minds as Christians and as Christian workers. Our object in life should not be so much to get through a great deal of work, as to give perfect satisfaction to Him for whom we are doing the work. There are many motives by which a person may be legitimately influenced in doing work for God. Some are influenced by their own personal aspirations, by a mighty instinct of benevolence; some are influenced by a sense of duty; some by considerations of the shortness of time; some by the thought of the need of the world. All these influences may be legitimate and salutary; but the one supreme motive that ought to influence the true child of God, and which when it does influence us purifies our work as nothing else will purify it, is the desire to please Him perfectly. As it has been so well expressed in two familiar lines, we should be

"Anxious less to serve Him much  
Than please Him perfectly."

If Martha had looked at things from His point of view she would have felt differently about Mary, differently about those household cares that were troubling her. But Martha in her attempts to serve Christ, though scarcely conscious of it, was really serving herself. Her great desire was, that everything should pass off well. Everything was to be clean and tidy, and well served and well managed, so that nobody should make any unfavourable criticism upon the whole *entertainment*. All was to be in as good style, and as comely and as satisfac-

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tory, as she could make it ; and with all a woman's sensitiveness about appearances she set about the task of arranging the feast, determined that it should be worthy of the household, and worthy of herself as well as worthy of the honoured Guest.

Was she wrong in giving Him her best? Ought she to have concluded that any rough-and-ready entertainment, any slovenly reception, would be good enough for One who was only a carpenter's son? Would she have done better if she had imitated the haughty negligence and discourtesy of her rich neighbour, Simon the Pharisee, who no doubt was a highly-respectable man, and probably a wealthy man, who could have commanded the services of a retinue of servants, but who seems to have thought that anything would do for Jesus of Nazareth, anything was good enough for a poor wandering prophet? If you gave Him a good dinner, that was surely all He could expect. As for the little courtesies and refinements of life, they would have been quite thrown away on such an unimportant Person !

If Gamaliel had come to see Simon, there would have been a great preparation, no doubt. "Bring out the silver basin for the great man's feet ; bring out the best linen, and let the slave stand ready to offer him proper respect, and to wash his feet as soon as he enters the house ; for a great man is this Gamaliel, and we must treat as becomes his rank and position." And when the great man entered, Simon would be ready to greet him with a kiss, and would entertain him with all the ceremony due to so distinguished a guest. But Jesus is only a poor man, having no particular social rank or position. There can be no need to make any fuss about Him. Give Him a good dinner, and that is as much as He can expect, and He should feel grateful for that. Such was Simon's way of treating Jesus. How different to Martha's ! Do you think Simon was right and Martha wrong? Never believe it. Our blessed Lord felt Simon's discourtesy keenly, and took occasion gently to reprove it, by pointing to the contrast between the reception that He had met with in that respectable mansion and the treatment He had received from a poor sinful woman, and doubtless He would have been still more pained if He had met with slight or discourtesy in the home of Martha.

Very different were her feelings. Her heart would have said, "He must have the very best I can give Him ; everything

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must be done just as well as if it were a prince coming to my house. If Herod himself were coming in royal state, my household should not make any more fuss. I will do all I can, because I am going to receive Him whom I value so highly and revere so greatly." Was she right or wrong? Surely she was perfectly right, and her conduct may well be regarded as an example in this respect. We are bound to offer Christ our very best, and nothing done for Him should be done in a slovenly, slipshod, negligent way, as if anything were good enough for God.

She was right in her principle, and yet she failed in carrying it out, and in that failure denied her Guest the very thing that pleased Him best. Yes, she was at this moment thinking far more of herself than of Christ; she was very eager that all should be successful, that every one should acknowledge her good management, and feel that she had done things thoroughly well. She had her character to maintain, as an excellent housewife, and on this occasion, at any rate, her reputation must not be allowed to moult a feather. So all unawares she is really serving herself in serving Christ, and thinking more of the feast than of the Guest. And so when she saw Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, she had no patience with her, and not much with Him. Instead of fussing about, and making sure that everything was in first-class order, there she was sitting enjoying herself at Jesus' feet.

Martha is quite indignant, and doesn't care to conceal it. And you know people of her class, while they are very useful in a church, and do a great deal of work, are very frequently indeed, like Martha, somewhat short-tempered. They have a great deal of energy, and a great deal of enthusiasm; but when things do not go exactly as they wish, the hasty word soon slips out, and the unpleasant thought is harboured, and that soon takes all the joy and all the blessing out of Christian work. How often is the work of the Church marred by this hasty spirit, and the Master is grieved in our very attempts to honour Him! I will answer for it that Martha did not feel half so happy after she had said those hasty words as she had been doing till then; nay, I can fancy how uncomfortable, and abashed, and annoyed at herself she must have felt when the calm reproof of the Master fell upon her ear, and her conscience told her that it was all too true. There was something better than being careful and cumbered about much service,



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and Mary's quiet sympathy had given more real satisfaction to the Master's heart than all her ceremonious civility could have induced. I fear that hasty word, and the discovery that with all her toil she had not fully pleased, nay, even had pained, the Master whom she loved so dearly, must have gone far to spoil Martha's enjoyment of that festal season.

And the same spirit still, I fear, not unfrequently mars a useful life, and desecrates our sanctities. Yes, there is something better than service ; there is something grander than doing. It is well to serve ; but better still to offer *acceptable* service. It is well to do ; but it is better still to do things in the right way. Martha had her own idea of what the right way was, and it was a worldly idea. If Martha had paused to think of Jesus and His feelings, she would soon have arrived at a very different conclusion, and have acted in a very different way. She might have turned it over in her mind thus : " Let me think now, which is Jesus getting most pleasure out of, Mary's company, or my fuss ? Which gratify Him most, those earnest eyes, which are fixed upon Him, that wondering gaze of enquiry on my sister's face, while she seems as though she is reading His inmost heart, or the careful garnishing of my rooms ? Which is He getting most pleasure out of, that strange fellowship which seems to be established between Him and her, that communion of spirit of which both He and she are conscious ; that, or a well-spread table ? " If she had thought the matter over, she would have come to the conclusion, I think, that, while it must be right to do things decently and in order, after all there is something He thinks of more than the well-spread table, the cleanliness, the polished silver, the pleasant ornaments, and the skilful service. He thinks far more about the silent eloquence of those two eager eyes fixed upon Him in adoring wonder, far more about that longing heart which reveals through those eyes that inward hunger and thirst of the soul which it is His supreme joy to fill.

What Martha needed was sympathy with Jesus Christ's spirit, to come within the charmed circle of His inner life—to understand His object and aims, to appreciate His longing desire, not to feed Himself with outward food, but to feed a famishing world with the revelation of God in His human form ; to reciprocate His spiritual desires for those He sought to lift to a high and heavenly level of experience. This was where Martha went wrong, and this where Mary went right. Now all this friction

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might have been saved if only Martha could have made a little time to do what Mary did, if she could only have spent a little season at Jesus' feet hearing His words. Had she done so the work would not have been neglected; for no doubt Mary would have taken her place, and have worked with a will while her sister was better employed. And thus, when the season at His feet came to an end, Martha would have gone back to the work calm and tranquil, and therefore much better able to do it, and to do it well. A few moments at Jesus' feet would, I am persuaded, have set everything before her in an entirely new light. It would have taken all the fuss, and fret, and fume out of her busy toil; it would have made her feel how small those outward matters are after all; it would have shown her how much more the Lord is concerned with our motive in serving Him than with the circumstances of our service; and thus both sisters would have had an equal and a double joy, the joy of serving their Lord in His outward body, but still more the joy of ministering pleasure and gratification to His heart.

As it was Mary chose the good part which could not be taken from her, and Martha missed it, and by her very conduct showed that the Master was right in describing that good part as the one thing needful. Yes, Martha evidently needed it, and for lack of it her occupation became a drudgery; and we all need it, for without it labour loses its value, and its dangers are multiplied while its benefits decrease. We fly from one thing to another, it may be, with great eagerness and breathless haste; but, alas! while there is much doing there is but little done; much friction, but little work accomplished; much struggling, but few victories; much noise, but little fruit.

Christian workers, let us learn our lesson. It is not enough to receive Jesus into our homes and into our lives—this we must do before anything else—but we need to sit at His feet, to gaze on His spiritual beauty, to hear His words, to yield ourselves wholly to His spiritual influence. Thus, and only thus, shall we find ourselves possessed of the one thing needful; and while hands or feet or brain are busy—or while all are busy together—there shall be a great calm within; there will be speed without feverish haste, and activity without bustle, and our work shall become sabbatic, and our lives an unbroken sanctity.

Whatever happens let us not be too busy to sit at Jesus' feet. We shall not really lose time by enjoying this; nay, we shall redeem the time; for there is usually much more time

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and strength forfeited by friction than by toil, and we shall gain in blessedness and enjoyment of our work, and gain in the quality of our work ; and, above all, we shall gain in that we shall give Him pleasure where otherwise we might only grieve Him. And this is indeed the crown of all our endeavours. He who pleases Him does not live in vain.

One of our poets has beautifully said —

“ The inward spirit sings  
There is no joy but calm.”

Surely we all know how much truth there is in the words. Well, it is this habit of sustained fellowship with Jesus that takes all the storms out of life. Life then begins to lose its hurry, and we begin to feel how true it is, as a dear friend once said to me when he saw me flurried, that we may be sure of this, that God allows us sufficient time for all the work that He intends us to do. And along with hurry we lose another evil thing, which not only rhymes with it, but generally accompanies it, and that is worry, and an excellent loss is that ; and along with the worry the little shortness of temper, the fractious pevishness which makes it sometimes seem as if our work were injuring instead of benefiting us ; and instead of all these evil things there is the presence of the Prince of Peace, and the inward stillness which His presence brings.

And now let me end where I began, by asking you, Have you received Jesus into your house? Go home, and take pen and paper, and write out the verse, leaving a blank where the name of Martha occurs ; and then solemnly ask yourself whether you can fill in your own name into that blank space. If you cannot, oh ! remember you are forfeiting the enjoyment of the one thing needful, and robbing your life of its truest dignity and its fairest crown. Oh, let us welcome Him into our hearts and our homes ; and so shall our lives be sanctities, and the end peace.

## Mary ;

### OR, THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE.

"And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word."—*Luke x. 39.*

THESE two sisters have been regarded, and rightly regarded, it seems to me, as illustrating to us, in their character, two contrasted elements of spiritual experience. Martha represents the active life, and Mary represents the contemplative life.

With a perversity which has been by no means unusual in the history of the Christian Church, these two forms of life have been so set the one against the other, as to leave the impression in religious minds that they are mutually incompatible with each other. It has been taught that the one is a higher form of spiritual experience than the other, and therefore, as the corollary of this position, that those who would wish to rise to the highest level of true Christian life and conduct, must be content to follow the example of a Mary, and turn their backs upon the occupations of a Martha. In other words, it has been held that we cannot truly enjoy the contemplative life unless we have done with the activities of life ; and that to engage in the ordinary duties of existence—domestic, social, and even religious—is to prevent ourselves from rising to the highest possible level of spiritual experience.

These theories began to prevail in very early days. Long before Christianity existed, the idea of such a life seems to have laid hold of the dreamy imagination of the Orientals, and to have found expression in Buddhism. Early in the Christian era, and long before gigantic systems of Monasticism cast their shadow over Christendom, the anchorites of the desert gave themselves up to a life of solitude, in order that they might be the better able to enter into the mysteries of the contemplative life, under the impression that only by shutting themselves up from the world, and secluding themselves from activity, was it possible for them to rise to the highest and most exalted privileges that belong to Christian experience. Then followed,

as I have said, the rise and progress of that vast system of Monasticism which has left so indelible a mark upon the character of the Christian world, and which has owed its fall in many places as much to its own corruptions and abominations, as to the jealousy of the secular power or to popular antipathies.

The system thus inaugurated, and which produced such a prodigious growth in the congenial soil of mediæval superstition, was based upon the theory that the contemplative was the life for those who listened to the counsel of perfection, and that only by fostering and cherishing this in lives of retirement and constant devotion could men attain to true saintliness. And so it came to pass that those who in the dark ages (and they were very dark) ought to have been giving light in the world and leading the way to higher things, who ought to have been doing a work that would have told for good upon mankind at large, were shut off from beneficial contact with society, owing to this perverse notion having taken possession of them, that they could not be really saints unless they secluded themselves from the world. The result was that those became dark ages indeed, because what ought to have been a light was placed under a bushel, instead of being placed in its proper position and illuminating all in the house.

I notice, not without concern, that in our own day a disposition has been shown in some quarters within our own Church, to revive the follies of mediæval asceticism in this respect. Any such attempt is greatly to be deplored; but it is perhaps another danger, that we have most to guard against, as evangelical Christians, and that is the danger of ignoring the contemplative life altogether. We live in proverbially busy times. Everything seems to go at railway speed. Christian agencies are being multiplied almost indefinitely. In the days of our forefathers scarcely one of the numerous institutions to which are now devoted so much of the time, thought, and enterprise of Christian people had sprung into existence. Why, even Sunday-schools had scarcely begun to come into operation, and now it would be difficult to find a parish without one; and then think of the multitudinous agencies for promoting the glory of God and the well-being of humanity that have sprung up since Sunday-schools began to become popular, and on which the energies of the Church of Christ are at this moment being expended.

We are all so very busy, that some of us feel almost over-



whelmed with the cares and anxieties of our work. There is so much to be done, and so few who give their hearts and minds to doing it, that those who would be real workers soon find themselves overtaxed, and as a result they are not unfrequently so oppressed with a feeling of responsibility and care, that there is a real practical danger—a danger which we need carefully to guard against—of letting our work slip in between us and the Person of Christ.

For we know, and do let us bear in mind, that Christian work in itself is intensely interesting; indeed, there is nothing more likely to become engrossing. We all know how absorbed men may become in their own special pursuits. For instance, we have read about Sir Isaac Newton, and how absorbed he used to be in his mathematical and astronomical researches, until he was scarcely able to give a thought to the common duties and circumstances of life, but used frequently to make the most ridiculous blunders about common-place things, because he took so profound an interest in, and was so fully occupied with, his own great discoveries. And so it is with other branches of knowledge. When men devote their attention to a particular branch of knowledge or science, it becomes a sort of passion, and they no longer find it necessary to stimulate themselves to exertion in that particular; rather they have to check or curb themselves, in order to prevent their minds from becoming too deeply absorbed in their favourite studies. And it sometimes happens that when the mind is given over to some special pursuit, interest in their work becomes so keen that men seem to lose all power of checking themselves, and their brains go on working, as it were, automatically, when they don't intend them to be working at all.

I well remember some years ago hearing a touching story of a late Cambridge professor, who was one of the greatest Greek scholars of our time. For some few months before he died he was advised by his friends to shut up his books, give up his studies, and go as much as possible into social life, in order that he might be drawn away from those subjects in which his mind had become so absorbed that his constitution was impaired; indeed, he was threatened with softening of the brain. On one occasion he was in a drawing-room surrounded by cheerful company, when a half-sad smile passed over his countenance as he observed to a friend, "What is the use of you shutting up my books and not allowing me to

work? While I have been here I have traced the derivations of three distinct Greek words, and detected their connection with certain Sanscrit roots." Such was the force of his ruling passion.

Now if we can become so absorbed in intellectual researches, is it a wonder that we should become even more absorbed in those higher pursuits in which it is the privilege of Christian people to engage? To be doing God's work; to be endeavouring to make people happy; to be the means of regenerating human hearts and lives, and of reforming the homes of the vicious and degraded; to be restoring those that are fallen, and rescuing those that are tempted—is not this necessarily a most engrossing work, and one that should employ all our energies?

It is well, my friends, indeed it is necessary, that we should be interested; for no man ever yet did anything well until he threw his whole heart into it and felt an interest in it. Yet in this very interest lies the danger; for may not the work become everything to us, and He for whom we work be allowed to fall into the background, and eventually be almost forgotten? And when this is the case our work soon loses the divine blessing, and must needs fail of the end for which it was designed; for in spiritual work above all other work it is true that "the blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and He adds no sorrow with it." If, then, we forfeit His smile, all our work must prove in the end sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.

Nor is it only our work that suffers. We suffer ourselves; for our very work has practically slipped in between us and the Lord for whom we are working, and thus becomes to us, instead of a means of grace, drawing us nearer to God, on the contrary, rather a barrier between ourselves and God—a means of pushing us off to a little distance from Him, and that distance has a tendency to grow until the work becomes everything and Christ next to nothing.

How shall we guard against this error? Yon mediæval monastic would reply, "Give up your work, tear yourself away from the activity of life, seclude yourself in the desert; and then you will be able to enjoy the fellowship of Christ and to enter upon the life of vision, the mystical blessedness of apprehension of the Divine." That is one answer; but it is not such as is given here, and we know what it has brought about in bygone ages. Let us look for an answer to all such misappre-

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hensions to the scene that lies before us. On the one side, there is busy Martha; on the other, quiet, contemplative Mary. On the one hand, a hard-working, fussy woman; on the other, a woman who is all ears and eyes, waiting to catch everything that falls from Christ. But here in the middle sits the perfect Man, and He it is that we are called upon to imitate. We are not told to be imitators of either Martha or Mary, but we are told to be imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ. Was there ever such a busy life as Christ's? Was there ever such a contemplative life as Christ's? Wherever He went He carried power along with Him for His work, just because He dwelt ever in the secret place of the most High, and abode under the shadow of the Almighty. He lived in the light of God; the smile of His Father was the sunshine of His whole existence; yet He worked so hard, that often He had scarcely time to eat His bread. But in the midst of it all He seems to have maintained a sense of unruffled calm and composure. He moved forward in the quietness of assured power. He was calm, because He lived in the presence of God; active, because He lived in the presence of perishing men. He was a true Quietist; for His life was very still, and yet its very stillness told.

We may learn a good deal in this respect from observing outward objects. The mightiest things are not always the noisiest things. You go down to one of your own quays, and there you will see the little donkey-engine, on the deck of one of your ships, that is being employed in loading or unloading its freight. What a fuss it makes! Your ear is at once painfully arrested by its clatter and noise; but when you come to examine it, you find it is only a small and insignificant thing, in spite of the noise it makes. It is very useful no doubt, and does its own work; but it does it very fussily, and that work is not a very great one. You descend into the vessel, and there you see the colossal engine which is to take the ship, donkey-engine and all, across the ocean; and it does all that work without making half as much noise as the little insignificant piece of mechanism that you have been listening to.

Or take a picture from Nature. Look at yonder little bubbling rill flowing down the mountain side, dashing in and out between the rocks, and making a noise which can be heard a considerable distance away. You follow the stream until eventually it is absorbed in a great river, which flows

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smoothly, calmly, and quietly along in all the majesty of its strength. Perhaps it is strong enough to bear up the navy of a great nation, and yet it does not make the noise that the little stream did. Do let us endeavour, dear friends, in this somewhat noisy age, to distinguish between noise and power. We sometimes think that noise is power, and that if we can create a certain amount of bustle we are doing a large amount of work. I think our work is done well just in proportion to the absence of bustle from it. The man who is quiet and calm, who goes forth in the strength and presence of God, seeking not his own glory, but the glory of his Master, will do a work for eternity; whereas in the case of the man who rushes here and there, always in a flurry, as if he had to keep the world from standing still, and had scarcely time to think or pray, his work will be frothy and superficial, and there will be very little solid result to show for all his labour.

Now to correct this noisy fussiness we need to learn to imitate Mary and to sit at Jesus' feet, and in silence and stillness of soul to hear His words. No amount of service will make up for the loss of this inward and secret fellowship of the soul with Christ—this hidden life of love, in which Christ and the consecrated heart are bound together in a certain holy intimacy and familiarity. This it is that sanctifies even the most common-place toil, and the loss of this robs even the holiest things of their sanctity. At Jesus' feet—that is our place of privilege and of blessing, and here it is that we are to be educated and fitted for the practical duties of life. Here we are to renew our strength while we wait on Him, and to learn how to mount on wings as eagles; and here we are to become possessed of that true knowledge which is power. Here we are to learn how real work is to be done, and to be armed with the true motive-power to do it. Here we are to find solace amidst both the trials of work, and they are not few, and the trials of life in general; and here we are to anticipate something of the blessedness of heaven amidst the days of earth; for to sit at His feet is indeed to be in heavenly places, and to gaze upon His glory is to do what we shall never tire of doing yonder.

Now all this is illustrated by what we read of Mary here and elsewhere. Let me ask you to observe that on each occasion on which she is mentioned we find her in the same place; not always in the same house, not always amidst the same scenes, but always in the same place—“*at Jesus' feet.*” And that is

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the place we ourselves must occupy if we desire to enjoy the blessedness of the contemplative life. Three times we get a look at Mary, and each time she is there—at Jesus' feet. She is at His feet when she is first introduced to us by St. Luke; and then again, in St. John xi., we hear of her falling down at Jesus' feet in her sorrow; and then, a third time, in the feast at Bethany, while Martha served and Lazarus sat at meat, Mary was once more at Jesus' feet. Thus in her experience she illustrated the words of Moses, "Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words." For at His feet is the place of reverence and godly fear; at His feet is the place for worship; and at His feet we can but look up, and with adoring awe continue to gaze upon the glories of His face revealed.

Notice then, first, Mary sat at Jesus' feet as a learner; and if we desire to learn, here it is that we must receive our lessons. Several thoughts suggest themselves to our minds as we see her sitting there. Let us dwell upon them for a few moments. First, sitting at His feet, she is taking the place of the lowly; and only those who wish to be such can learn of Jesus. The proud and self-confident, whether they be intellectually proud, or morally proud, or spiritually proud, will ever have to go empty away; but "such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way." Next, observe, it is the place of *true* honour and dignity; for it is better to be a junior scholar in the school of Christ than to be a distinguished philosopher untaught by Him. It used to be the boast of the ancient Christian apologists, that the merest babe in Christ was familiar with the true solution of problems that had vainly exercised the greatest thinkers of the heathen world. We may still affirm that there is an inward and practical knowledge of God and of His relations with us which can never be acquired by any acquaintance with the mere theory of religion, nor by any educational process save that which takes place when, in all humility of soul and self-distrust, we sit at Jesus' feet.

Next, let me point out to you that while she was sitting here she was in a position, not only to learn by Him, but to learn of Him. It was not merely that she heard the truth from Him; it was rather that she found the truth in Him. He was Himself to her the Truth. She found in Him the "*word of God.*" Everything about Him spoke,—that tender earnestness, that womanlike sympathy, that manly indignation against all that



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was false, and mean, and hypocritical. His winsome manner ; His benevolent expression ; the eloquent glance of those eyes, now sorrowful or plaintive, now kindling into vehement flame ; His look, His features, nay, the very tones of His voice ;—all seemed to her a revelation, and such a revelation as rendered her heart spellbound, as by the charm of some great Enchanter, while she drank in the wondrous lessons and felt the new, strange joy of such discoveries in her heart.

And we too, dear brethren, need to discern the difference between learning about Christ or learning by Christ and *learning* Christ. We may be good theologians and yet bad Christians. I fear many are, but surely this must be because we do not learn Christ ; and perhaps we do not learn Christ because we so little sit at His feet.

Oh, dear friends, that is the place to learn Him ! If, when we read our Bibles from day to day, we would make a point of putting ourselves at Jesus' feet to begin with ; if we would regard our daily study as an opportunity of hearing God's voice speaking to us through Christ ; if lying at His feet in an attitude of humble expectancy, and, above all, in an attitude of contemplation, we sought to "see Jesus," to obtain fresh views of His moral beauty and know more of his character and mind, don't you think we should soon find our Bible-reading a much more satisfactory thing than it often is ? I cannot but think that one glimpse of Christ seen before we enter upon our daily life would so sanctify all our day's experience as to contribute more than anything else to brand "holiness unto the Lord" upon our character and upon our lives.

When Moses came down from the mount and stood before the people, he wist not that the skin of his countenance shone while he talked with them ; but the people looked with wonder upon him, as in his countenance he reflected the glory of the God in whose presence he had been. Even so they who thus enter into the secret place of the Most High will carry the light of Jesus' presence forth from His presence. Though there may be no outward shining of the skin of our countenance, there will be a certain air of holiness—I know not how else to describe it—which can neither be assumed nor successfully imitated, about their life and conversation, which will witness to the character of the society they have been enjoying.

We cannot sit with Mary now before a visible Christ, but we can contemplate His moral features even as she gazed upon

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His outward countenance, and we can hear his spiritual teaching even as she heard His outward voice. And there is a sense in which we may be said to know more of Christ than at this time Mary did or could know ; for she had never gazed upon the cross, and read the more perfect revelation of the Divine character as it is written there. Nor had the Holy Spirit as yet descended in all His Pentecostal power ; and let us remember that it is His special office to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. Surely those advantages may be regarded as compensating us in some measure for any advantage that Mary had, in being able to enjoy Christ's bodily presence !

Oh, let us make the best of the glorious privileges which do belong to us, instead of envying this blessed woman hers ! She gazed on Him who was fairer than the children of men, and found that full of grace were His lips ; but let us remember that we also may behold the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And to gaze at Him is to admire Him, and to admire Him tends to increase our love to Him, and to love Him is to be assimilated to Him. Thus do we become changed into the same image as by the Spirit of God.

Come, let us look at Mary, that we may learn to be a learner. How impressed she is with His superior wisdom ; how little confidence has she in her own. Nay, the more she learns, I doubt not, the more she feels her ignorance. Oh, blessed is the ignorance that brings us so near to infinite wisdom, and blessed the child-like simplicity that enables us to understand what to the world may seem inexplicable ! Then see how absorbed she is. I can never believe that Mary was selfish and inconsiderate. If she had been, I feel sure Jesus would have gently reproved and not commended her ; but she was so completely absorbed in wondering interest, so rapt from all other considerations of a lower order, that it seemed as if she could only hear His voice, only see His face, only feel that He was opening heaven to her soul. And surely to learn of Him we must not only look, but look intently, and seek to be deaf and blind to all else while we give ourselves to this. It is the wandering eye, the wayward desire, the fugitive thought, that so often mar our fellowship with Him and rob us of the true blessings of the contemplative life. Dear friends, if we would learn of Him, let us not only sit at His feet, but sit as Mary sat.

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When Mary is next introduced to our notice she is again at Jesus' feet, and this time she is at His feet as a mourner. Blessed are those mourners whom sorrow drives to Jesus' feet; for they shall indeed be comforted! Refer for a moment to the passage, John xi. 32: "Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." And she didn't say any more. Martha said a good deal more, and it would have been better if Martha had left unsaid some of the things she did say. But Mary had nothing more to say; she had placed the matter in Christ's hands, and there she lay at His feet in her sorrow. Again I say, Blessed are those mourners whom sorrow gently leads to Jesus' feet!

The Christian's sorrows, dear friends, whatever their cause, are not to be regarded as though they were distinct from the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. I have heard people say that we cannot speak of the sorrows that come to us in the ordinary course of nature, as if they were part of His sufferings,—that only those belong to this fellowship which are directly endured for Christ's sake. I cannot agree with them. I believe that we may.

I believe there is no tear wrung from a Christian's aching heart but that it may become a part of the sufferings of the Man of sorrows. I believe He took upon Himself the sorrows as well as the sins of humanity, and that, when sorrow is put upon us, it is in order that He may bring us into fellowship with Him who is the great High Priest in the great Temple of Sorrow. And when He does this, is there not a strange, deep joy that wells up in our hearts in the midst of our sorrow? Is there not a kind of sweetness in our tears—a bright gleam of sunshine streaming through the riven cloud?

Oh, blessed are the trials that bring us to Jesus' feet! The sorrows of this world harden and embitter some people. They grow sour and selfish. When those nearest and dearest are taken away from them, they seem to think there is nothing left but self, and that the only thing is to fill up the empty place by some fresh self-indulgence. And thus sorrow worketh death; for selfishness is the death of that which is highest and noblest in our natures; it is selfishness that keeps us aloof from God, who is the true Source of all life, and in whom alone life can be sustained. But while the sorrows of this world sometimes harden and prove injurious to those that are

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of the world, and tend to drive them further and further from God, it is otherwise with the Lord's own children. When the Lord sends us sorrow, and it drives us to His feet, we then begin to learn more about Jesus than we ever knew before.

I don't suppose that Mary had seen Jesus weep before. She had sat at His feet; she had heard His voice. She knew He was full of love, gentleness, and pity; but do you think she knew as much about that love, that gentleness, that pity, then, as she did now when she gazed upon Him and saw the great tears gathering in His eyes? And the people whispered one to another, "Look at Jesus! He is weeping. 'Behold how He loved him!'" I dare say she felt as if she had never loved Him so much before, as she loved Him then when she saw those tears of His.

When we feel crushed with sorrow, do let us try to remember that Jesus Christ Himself was the Man of sorrows. Let us throw ourselves at once at His feet; that is the place for the mourner. There you will find the flowers of paradise growing amid the shadows of death; there you will find the light of a glorious day piercing through the dark and gloomy portal of that sad and lonely vale. And as we thus are brought into fellowship with His sorrow, in our very tears we find a pledge and earnest of that tearless world, where, as we lie at Jesus' feet, He Himself shall wipe our tears away.

But don't let your tears drive you away from Christ. I once met with a lady who told me that her sorrows had taken her from Christ. As long as things went well with her, she thought she was making pretty good progress. She followed Christ so long as He gave her sunshine, and smooth water, and favourable breezes; but when the storm arose her faith gave way, and she turned her back on her Lord. There came a terrible sorrow, a crushing sorrow; and the fabric of her confidence gave way beneath its weight. I said to her, "Oh, dear soul, you have learnt that lesson the wrong way! That sorrow was sent to drive you to Jesus' feet, and you have allowed it to push you away from Him. Why did you not do what Mary did? Blessed would have been the sorrow that would thus have brought you into closer fellowship with Christ, but you have turned what might have been a blessing into a curse, by running away from Him."

Now, dear friends, let us look at Mary once again. We have seen her at the Lord's feet as a learner, and we have seen her

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there as a mourner ; and now, in John xii., we shall see her at the Lord's feet as a worshipper. Turn for a moment to the beginning of that chapter : "Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom He raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper ; and Martha served." Dear Martha ! how I love her for it ! Always true to her character ; never weary of waiting on such a Guest, and this time not even in her own house. Even in the house of Simon Martha must wait upon her Lord ; no mere hireling or slave shall be allowed to minister to Him while Martha's willing hands and heart are near.

But she doesn't scold Mary this time, although her sister is faithful to her character too, and still thinks more of pleasing Him than of serving Him. I think Martha has learnt her lesson. Don't you think she has ? It is not *she* that finds fault this time when Mary pours the precious ointment on the Master's feet. Careful, thrifty Martha leaves her sister's apparently reckless extravagance alone. Perhaps, in spite of adverse comments, Mary might be right again ; so Martha occupies herself with her service, and leaves her sister to do as she was led. And blessed was she in her service this time.

Oh, what a feast that must have been, where Christ and the man whom He had raised sat together ! There was Martha, as ever, busy ; and Lazarus, happy in his Friend's society ; but where was Mary ? Our Lord peradventure may have glanced round the table to see that well-known face, but He saw it not. The meal proceeds, but Mary does not appear. Then as the feast draws to a close, perhaps when there is a moment of hush in the conversation, Jesus is aware of another presence ; and looking about Him, He sees one kneeling *at His feet*. "Then took Mary a pound of ointment . . . and anointed the feet of Jesus." She dare not anoint His head. At His feet was the place for her. She is true to His feet still. Bound as by a spell to those sacred feet, so soon to be pierced by the executioner's nail, she takes her pound of ointment, "very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair ;" and we read further, that "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."

Yes, dear friends ; and I think the world is filled with the odour of that ointment. It has not lost its fragrance yet ; it is as fresh now as it was 1800 years ago. Oh, what a thrill of joy passed through His heart as He felt that there was one



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person in the whole world in full sympathy with Him, and perhaps only one! Others were occupied with their carnal dreams of earthly grandeur; but there was one who saw before her the corpse of her dear Lord, and, anticipating those kind offices which were so soon to be performed on Him, Mary pours the precious ointment on His living body. And Jesus says, "She has done it for my burial;" and at that moment He must have felt that Mary's prophetic soul knew all about it. She had read it all in His eye. She had discovered the latent sorrow pressing on her Master's heart; for not in vain had she sat at His feet and heard His words. Thus was she prepared for worship; for to worship God we must know Him; and to know Him we must see Him, and observe Him, and delight in Him.

Dear friends, it is most important that we Christians should have clear views about worship. What does worship consist of? Surely not in prayer; not merely in asking what we need. I don't mean to say that prayer is not a constituent part of worship; but it falls very far short of being all, or even a very considerable portion, of the worship that is due to God. Mary lets us into the true secret of worship. What does it consist of? Not merely of the repetition of time-honoured phrases, which, though full of meaning, are apt to lose their meaning by frequent repetition. It is well that we should use the words that express our thoughts. But there is a danger in the use of even the best words, lest by familiarity with them we lose sight of their true import, and they cease to express any definite or intelligible thoughts at all. There is a real danger of our utterances becoming mere sounding phrases, and nothing else; and it is a danger we must jealously guard against. We cry, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." How much do we mean by it? We may mean everything, or we may mean nothing.

The truest form of worship is, first of all, the presentation to God of all that is most precious, all that is most costly, that we have or that we are. He worships best who presents himself, and, above all, that heart of his, the home of his affections; that heart which Christ Himself has liberated, and set on fire with holy love. He worships best who presents that heart of his, just as Mary presented the ointment. None, I am persuaded, gives greater pleasure to the heart of Jesus than the worshipper who pours forth at His feet the precious ointment of adoring love. Oh, if we can but lie at His feet, and just

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let our hearts flow forth to Him in the one all-absorbing thought, "I am His, He is mine ; I am His, He is mine ;" so we worship best.

And there is another thought closely connected with this. Mary worshipped well, not only because she gave her best, but because she saw the best that was in Him. The keen vision of her love had penetrated into the secret of His nature, and she observed what others did not. She entered into full sympathy with Him, and she realized what others did not, because she was raised to the level of His life, while others were only walking as men. Dimly and indistinctly she discerned the inward heroism which was to shine forth amidst the horror and shame of Calvary, and she paid her humble tribute to the glory of this divine benevolence as she anointed Him for the burial.

How do they worship God in heaven? They worship Him by gazing upon Him till the whole being is filled and over-borne with the consciousness of what He is. How do the Seraphim worship Him? "With twain they covered their face, and with twain they covered their feet, and with twain they did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." What did it mean? Although they covered their faces in awe, yet they had seen enough of the divine character to be overawed by the contemplation of God's perfection ; and with every blazing forth of the divine glory there is a fresh note of praise, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." Such is the worship of heaven, and such in measure will our worship be if we enter in spirit into the secret place of the Most High, and pass in review before our inner eye the glory of His attributes. To worship God because He is what He is, to rejoice in the thought that He is what He is, to give thanks unto Him for His great glory—this is indeed the true secret of worship. They worship best who admire most ; and they admire most who, like Mary, gaze most intently on Him who is the centre of all perfection—the altogether lovely. To receive His glory upon our own hearts as it streams forth from His Person in all its moral splendour, and then to reflect it back on Him and on all around, this is to worship indeed. The faithful moon honours the sun, no longer visible to earth, by catching his glories, and reflecting them back upon a darkened world. And even so the worshipping church mirrors forth the glories of her ascended Lord as those glories

## Mary.

invisible to the world fall full upon her, and thus she worships Him.

Yet once again, they worship best whose worship springs from love, and whose acts of devotion are simply the articulate expression of a burning affection that throbs and glows within. Cold prayers, spiritless praises, glorious words that have no counterpart in our inward consciousness, oh, how distasteful must these be to Him who inhabiteth the praises of Israel! Surely these vain oblations and this unhallowed incense must be an abomination in His sight. But loving acts that spring forth from the heaven-watered soil of loving hearts—flowers of Paradise in a too loveless world—surely these must please the Lord better than a bullock that hath horns and hoofs; and these love-offerings are only possible to those who lie much at His feet. For love grows not by mere labour, still less by mere mental knowledge; love grows by communion (by spiritual familiarity, shall I say?) with the divine. Alas, how often do we fall from the proper level of the love-life, because we are so hurried in our visits to His feet! We have scarce sat down and begun to gaze, ere some Martha-like care, or business, or pleasure, diverts us from our resting-place. And thus the mystic spell is broken which Love weaves around the once loveless human heart, to bring it into the sacred fellowship of love.

Thus Mary passes from our view, last seen worshipping at Jesus' feet. When next we see her, perhaps we shall find her there still, and at home there for ever. I like to remember that she had chosen that good part which could not be taken from her. So we may look forward to the future, and think of brighter scenes, when the humiliations and sorrows of Him whom she loved will be passed for ever. Yonder in that better land I can only think of Mary still in her chosen place. Others may sit, the one on the right hand and the other on the left, in His kingdom; but Mary's good part will bind her still, methinks, to the very feet of Christ, finding her heaven still in contemplation, ever making fresh discoveries of the divine beauty, and feasting her soul on His revealed perfection. And this is the *one thing needful*. The apprehension of Christ, as the image of the invisible God—the rest of the understanding;—the joy of the imagination;—the satisfaction of the affections—all in Him—to find this is to find what alone makes human experience complete, and crowns our native emptiness as with all the fulness of God.

## The Peril of Legality.

“Cast out the bondwoman and her son : for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”—*Gal.* iv. 30, 31.

THERE are two prominent dangers incident to the spiritual life, against which we have to guard with equal care if we would be Christians indeed. The one is the danger of legality, and the other is the danger of antinomianism. Of the first of these two dangers I have to speak to you to-day; and with respect to the second I shall address you, God willing, in my next sermon.

These two forms of danger began to exhibit themselves very early in the history of the Christian Church. The Galatians seem to have become the victims of the first, and to some extent the Corinthians fell victims to the second. The Galatians, after tasting the glorious liberties of the gospel of Christ, fell under the yoke of legal bondage, forfeited their liberty, and ran no small risk of falling from grace, to use the Apostle's expression. The Corinthians, on the other hand, seem to have become somewhat lax in their notions of morality, and to have been disposed to act as though the law of God were abrogated by the gospel, and as if it were possible for men to lead unholy and immoral lives, and still retain the benefits of Christ's atoning work.

We cannot help noticing that St. Paul's tone in addressing the Galatians is very severe; indeed there is a contrast presented to us between his manner in addressing the Galatians, and that which he usually adopts in commencing his epistles. He begins his epistle to the Galatians, not with one of those heartfelt exclamations of grateful praise to Almighty God for the blessings which the Church was enjoying, and the fruits of righteousness springing from them, which are common in his writings; but he begins at once by sounding the note of censure: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.”

The severity of St. Paul's tone may lead us to the conclusion

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that the danger that he was referring to is a danger that we have to regard with the utmost possible jealousy. It is a very serious danger and a very practical danger—a danger which, if we give place to it, may be productive of the most serious practical consequences in our personal life and experience. Therefore I would ask you to bear in mind, if what I say this afternoon may seem somewhat doctrinal rather than practical, that it is just one of those cases in which Christian doctrine, practice, and experience are so closely bound together that you cannot dissociate them from each other. In fact, you cannot fall into a doctrinal error in this particular respect without grievously injuring the nature and character of your spiritual life; and hence it is of the utmost possible importance that we should have a clear apprehension of what our relations to the Law actually are, and what the particular error in regard to this may be, against which St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians specially warns us.

The Galatians' error—the error of legality—arose from a misconception of the nature of the effects of Redemption as modifying our relations with the Divine Law. The Galatians regarded Redemption as leaving them, so far as the Law was concerned, very much in the same position as they occupied before they accepted its benefits; and, starting from these false premises, they proceeded to live out a thoroughly legal life, conforming themselves to Jewish customs and usages, and in their own moral experiences allowing themselves to be affected only by considerations of a strictly legal character. And so it came to pass that St. Paul had to point out to them that really their case was in no wise different from that of those who were still under the law. They had fallen from the true level of Christian conduct to a level altogether beneath their dignity, and he endeavours to arouse them to a sense of their loss in this respect, by pointing out to them that if their position were the right one, then Christ has died in vain. The whole scheme of gospel redemption is altogether superfluous, if it be a fact that we still continue as much under the law as though no Christ had ever lived and died for us.

To establish this point, St. Paul endeavours to make as plain as possible our relations with the Law of God given on mount Sinai, and he shows that this Law was given in the childhood of the human race, that it was suited to the then condition of those to whom it was given, but that it was,



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strictly speaking, provisional in its character, and does not meet or satisfy the spiritual necessities of those who are raised to the higher level of a more complete revelation, and a grander and more advanced dispensation of divine grace.

To illustrate this point, St. Paul uses a figure which will commend itself to the imagination of us all. He tells us in the third chapter that "before faith came" (that is to say, before the clear revelation of the object of faith, and of the operation of faith in the salvation of man, was made known), "we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." He goes on to say, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ;" and then he adds, "After that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." In the fourth chapter he enlarges further on the idea: "Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father."

Here we have a picture which we may as well dwell upon for a few moments. The word employed by St. Paul in the third chapter may be regarded as having a double meaning. First, in a strict etymological sense, the word indicates the trustworthy confidential slave, whose duty it was to bring the boys to school, and see that they did not play truant—"a child-leader," a person entrusted with the care of these young people on their way to school, and who was responsible for seeing that they got to school safely. But the word came to be used in a higher sense to denote any one who was responsible for the training of the young; in fact, to mean much the same thing as the terms used in the fourth chapter, where the heir is said to be "under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father."

Very well then; the Law was first of all our pedagogue or child-leader, and the Apostle tells us that its office was to bring us to Christ, who, under the Gospel, is our true Teacher. The Law exercised this office by preparing the way for the revelation of Christ. It brought man to Christ by showing him his need of Christ; for, as St. Paul teaches, by the law was the knowledge of sin. It led men towards Christ by its sacrificial system and ritual, which all witnessed to the necessity of the atonement, and prepared the way for the revelation of the great High Priest. It led men towards Christ just because

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it awakened desires which it could not gratify, and witnessed to the need of a life-power which it could not impart.

But St. Paul varies the figure in the commencement of the fourth chapter, and proceeds to represent the Law itself as a schoolmaster. "The heir, as long as he is a child, is under tutors and governors, though he be lord of all." So has God dealt with humanity, which is the heir of His own greatness. It has been with the race as it is with the individual. In the early days of our life we are placed under authority; rules are laid down for us, which we are expected to obey without asking any questions. We have to learn much that we see no reason for, and to endure much that may seem to be irksome; but all this tends to form character, and fits the heir for the moment when he shall become his own master. When that time arrives he ceases to be a child, but does not cease to be a son; rather he begins now to take the place of a son, instead of the place of a child. As a son he enters into his father's mind and sympathizes with his thoughts and feelings. He no longer obeys mechanically, without asking why; but if he be a dutiful son he obeys intelligently, because he appreciates the purposes of the father. Perhaps he works as hard now as he did when a boy at school, perhaps a good deal harder; but he works because he takes a pleasure in working, and feels that his father's interests are identical with his own, and not because he is obliged to work. He has laid aside bondage, and entered upon liberty, and he finds a manly pleasure in exercising his liberty in a rational way, that shall promote alike his father's interests and his own.

Such is the contrast between the life of the Jews under the imperfect law of bondage, and the life of the Christian under the perfect law of liberty. The Israelite had to obey even when obedience seemed scarcely reasonable, and to obey without asking questions. Perhaps we do not sufficiently realize how very trying and burdensome the ancient yoke of bondage must have seemed to those who found precepts and regulations confronting them in all the details of their daily life; but thus the imperious claims of God upon human nature were witnessed to, and habits of reverence and obedience were formed which were to prove a blessed and priceless legacy to happier ages of gospel liberty.

So the dispensation of the law did its work, and then passed away, to be succeeded in the fulness of time by the dispensa-

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tion of the Holy Spirit, whose supremacy in our nature was to establish law *within*, and to form higher principles, from which holy and devoted conduct should flow.

Now all this is illustrated by St. Paul in his own striking way, by a reference to an episode in Old Testament story, which, as he puts it, offers a wonderful spiritual allegory. We are taken back to the origin of the favoured race, and referred to the household of Abraham, "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, Do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise." Which things are an allegory. The bondwoman and her son represent, he tells us, the legal dispensation, or the legal spirit, while Sarah is regarded in the allegory as the type of the "Jerusalem which is above," and which is "the mother of us all;" and Isaac, who sprang from her, is a free-born citizen of that heavenly country.

Now notice more particularly. The child of Hagar was born after the flesh. For a time, however, he that is born of the flesh occupies the position apparently of Abraham's heir. He is Abraham's only child—the sole representative of Abraham's name and person, so to speak. But a clear intimation is given, by divine promise, that not in Ishmael was the promised seed to be called; that not in Ishmael was the promise of God to Abraham to be fulfilled. He that is of the flesh cannot inherit the promise. We turn from him to Isaac, and the moment we do so we are confronted with the supernatural.

Everything about Isaac is supernatural. He is the child of promise. His very existence is a miracle. Long after Sarah had laid aside all thoughts of ever embracing a child of her own, Isaac is given her by the divine intervention. He was born by a miracle. And here, my friends, we learn our first great lesson with respect to the contrast. It is only by the intervention of the supernatural, only by divine power, that the spiritual Isaac can be born; only by a miracle can we be raised from nature unto grace, and as children of grace become the true heirs, according to the promise. What says St. John, speaking of those who are of the promised seed? "To as many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become the sons of God; even to as many as believed on His name: which were born, not of flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God."

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Thus it is, even to this day, that the spiritual Isaac is born, and the new life begins. And the name of the child thus born reveals his nature. He is the child of laughter, born unto a new joy-world, where slavery is unknown. When Sarah heard that she was to bear a child in her old age, an incredulous smile had passed over her face. She could not bring herself to believe that such a thing was possible. But by-and-by the smile of unbelief was turned into a smile of holy joy, as she found that all things were possible with God. And when first the thought of the new life is presented to the human soul it is not to be wondered that incredulously we should smile with Nicodemus, and ask impatiently, How can a man be born again when he is old? It might be a thing much to be desired, were it possible; but who can compass so impossible a result?

By-and-by, however, the incredulous sneer of unbelief is turned into a smile of holy ecstasy, as we find there is a power that can lift us out of nature into a new and glorious life, and that we, by the grace of God, may become, like Isaac, the children of laughter, the children of promise.

How frequently and how literally have I seen this name fulfilled in the experience of those whom it is my privilege to lead to Christ! How often have I seen the birth of Isaac revealed in the lighting up of the face that seemed so overshadowed and sorrowful—nay, I have sometimes even heard an actual burst of holy laughter—when the new light and joy has suddenly rushed into the soul! “The Lord hath made me to laugh.”

Ishmael was the child of *the slave*, and those whom he represents inherit the slave spirit. The fear of God is upon them, and by it they are urged forwards or kept back; but all is bondage from first to last. But the child of laughter is also the child of *the Princess*; for such is the meaning of Sarah's name. He is descended from the queenly city, that Jerusalem which is above, *which is free*, which is the mother of us all. And so he carries about with him the consciousness of his true dignity; for he is a prince with God, and free because God is his Father and heaven his home. This consciousness of his true dignity will keep him from grovelling earthly-mindedness and lead him to despise sin; not because, as a slave, he may be punished for committing it, but because, as a son of God, it would be a stain upon his true honour.

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Now you observe these two sons don't get on well together. Ishmael is laughing at him who is the child of laughter, and this suggests to us that the name of the promised seed has a double significance. He is a child of laughter because he laughs, but he is also the child of laughter because he is laughed at; indeed, we may say the true-born citizen of heaven is laughed at just because he is the child of laughter. The world derides the Christian's joy because it cannot understand it, nor can it appreciate the enthusiasm of liberty which distinguishes the heir of the promises. And carnal and legal religion is even more bitterly opposed to the character and genius of the new life, than is mere worldliness. The legalist can understand what he would call sound, practical piety; he can appreciate outward earnestness and strict morality, but he decries spirituality as mysticism, and the mighty impulses of the new life appear to him no better than fanaticism. He that is born after the flesh still persecutes him that is born after the Spirit. The religious world cannot participate in the laughter of the true child of promise; it knows not the source from which that laughter springs; and that which men do not understand they are usually disposed to deride.

And so it comes to pass that, as the two cannot live together, the edict has to go forth, "Cast out the bondwoman and her child: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman;" and in that kingdom, of which the sons of promise are already heirs, the sons of the bondwomen will have no place.

But to come to ourselves. These two sons of Abraham represent, not only two distinct classes of persons, but two contrasted states of soul and forms of experience, one or other of which may be expected to be dominant in our lives. St. Paul goes on to say, "So we, brethren, as Isaac was, are not sons of the bondwoman, but of the free." And so it should be with us all; but there is another influence ever ready to assert itself, and to rob us of our spiritual liberties. There is a Hagar in every human heart, from whom may spring the slavish progeny of a legal and unspiritual life. And this son of the bondwoman is to be cast out, and not to be allowed to share the heirdom with the child of laughter, the son of the freewoman.

The Galatians exhibited legality in its grossest and most undisguised forms. They went back to the bygone dispensa-



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tion, and attempted to revive Jewish customs and observances and ceremonies that had lost both their meaning and their value, now that the fulness of time had come. This was about as reasonable as if a young man who has just accepted a junior partnership in his father's firm were to insist upon returning to what was once his form in a public school, and determine to submit himself once more to all the restraints of his earlier years.

The error, as exposed by St. Paul, seems so strange and grotesque that we wonder how any could fall into it, and are not surprised at the almost impatient exclamation, "O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you?" But when we pass on to study the history of the Christian Church, we soon find that if the Galatians were the first certainly they were not the last to fall into this snare. The history of mediæval Christianity, what is it but one long, sorrowful exhibition of the same bondage of legality? only clothed now in a nominally Christian instead of a Jewish garb. Hagar and Ishmael had it all their own way in those long, dark ages, and cruelly did they persecute any unfortunate representatives of Isaac, wherever they found them.

In our own day there are not wanting some who seem very eager to reinstate Hagar in all her mediæval glories. If we may not emulate the Galatians in restoring Jewish ceremonies, at any rate we can invent others like them; if we may not incorporate the code of the Pharisees into the Christian system, at any rate we can frame equally elaborate rules of life; if our teachers are no longer called Rabbis, they may be called "Father;" and if the tradition of the elders is no longer supreme, the "voice of the Church" is ready to take its place.

I am no polemist, and I am little disposed to take part in the theological strife of the times; but here I see a grave danger, and it would be a dereliction of duty did I not refer to it. I would like to ask the earnest and excellent men who lead the van of this backward movement—Did Hagar produce such a desirable state of affairs in mediæval times, when she had things all her own way, that we need wish to restore her supremacy? Is not this nineteenth century, with all its faults and sins, a perfect millennium as compared with the condition of society during those lengthy periods in which legality was most supreme, and gospel light and liberty were almost unknown? Before we endeavour to reimpose a broken yoke

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of bondage, surely it were well to reflect on the effects of that same yoke of bondage on our forefathers of the Christian name.

To any who are in danger of becoming thus entangled I would say, Guard your Christian liberties. "The son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." You cannot patch up a compromise between Sinai and New Jerusalem; either we must be content to surrender the liberties of heaven, or we must be determined to cast off the yoke of bondage.

But most of those whom I am addressing to-day may perhaps feel that they are not exposed to this form, at any rate, of the legal danger. They have no sympathy with these attempts to re-erect the fabric of mediæval superstition; indeed, they regard all such attempts with suspicion and aversion. Surely, then, they are free from this peril. Ah, my friends, this danger of legality is a great deal more subtle than people think, and I wish to point out to you how subtle it is! I am persuaded there is not a little of downright legality—legality in its worst form, because in its most subtle form—to be found amongst those who call themselves evangelical Christians, and perhaps in quarters where it is least expected.

The plain and sad truth is, that when the freeman does not cast out the bondwoman and her son, the bondwoman and her son will always contrive to cast out him. Isaac and Ishmael can't get on together, and hence, if Isaac be missing, there is fair ground for an inference that Hagar and Ishmael have cast him out. Now we must, I fear, perceive that Isaac is conspicuous by his absence from the lives and hearts of too many professing Christian people. Their religion is a matter of restraint, rather than of joyous liberty; of routine, and more or less mechanical routine, rather than of love and devotion. They measure things by an ethical rather than by a religious standard, and are concerned to enquire whether things are right or wrong, rather than to discover whether or not they are pleasing to the Lord they profess to serve, and consonant with His will. They are conscientious rather than enthusiastic, and formal rather than devotional. They seem to think much more of easing their conscience than of glorifying their God, and of doing their duty than of enjoying their privileges.

This word Duty indeed may be taken as the key-note of the lives of such Christians. Show them that any particular action

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or course of conduct is their duty, and they will endeavour to perform it, although it may be with the feeling that it is an irksome task, and with a great sense of relief to their conscience when once the thing has been somehow or other got over. Or, again, show them that it is their duty to abstain from any thing, either wrong or doubtful, and they will abstain, albeit perhaps somewhat regretfully. This idea of Duty is to them what the idea of Law was to the ancient Pharisee—it is the tutor or governor under whom they live their life.

Now, perhaps some amongst us might be disposed to say, "Yes; and a very good governor too is this same Duty. Would to God that his voice were more regarded, and that men were more actuated than they are by a sense of duty." "Never," said a correspondent in writing to me some little time ago, "never, whatever you do, inveigh against that grand old word Duty, now too much in danger of becoming obsolete." And no doubt there is a sense of the word which is grand and heroic. There is, however, another sense of the word, which is servile and very prosaic. We remember what was the effect produced on one memorable occasion on our English fleet, when all along the line the signal floated out, "England expects every man to do his duty." But there obviously duty was synonymous with devotion. Those who saw that signal raised were expected to risk all, to sacrifice, if needs be, even their very lives, at their country's call.

We may put the thing thus, considering our infinite obligation to God, all devotion must be duty. We cannot do more than it is our duty to do, but it is not equally true that all duty is devotion. Think of one of Nelson's sailors called up on a cold and wet night to take his turn at keeping watch on deck. Hear his muttered grumble as he turns out of his comfortable berth, and slowly drags himself upstairs, invoking all manner of unimaginable evils on the head of the messmate that has awakened him, and you have a picture of duty of the true legal type. He is on duty now; and this is just what so many Christians feel themselves to be. When a man regards religious obligation very much as that sailor regards naval discipline, he is under the Law, not the Gospel; he is a son of the bondwoman, not of the free.

But now, to illustrate our point, look at that same sailor when all his latent patriotism has been kindled by the sound of the first gun at Trafalgar. Does he wait now to consider

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whether it is his duty to be the first to leap on board the enemy's ship, and dash into the thickest of the fray? True, fight as bravely as he may, he is only doing his duty to his country, according to Nelson's ideas of the meaning of his own signal; but he does his duty because he yields to the enthusiasm of devotion, and not because the thought of duty ever crosses his mind.

Even so we Christians, whatever we may do, cannot do more, as our Lord teaches us, than what it is our duty to do; but we shall then come nearest to doing our real duty when we think least about it. He who refers all things to a higher standard, and who thinks not of duty, but of Him whom he loves and seeks to serve, will no doubt do his duty better than another with whom the thought of duty is the source of obligation; but this will not be his motive, and hence his conduct will be free and spontaneous; his life will be a thing of joyous liberty, a child of laughter, not a son of the bondwoman.

Put the two men side by side, and you shall see them contrasted in all the details of their daily life, and it is by contemplating these that we shall best understand the difference between legality and true evangelical freedom. Both the spiritual Isaac and the spiritual Ishmael will begin the day with prayer. The former will pray because he loves to have communion with God, because he feels his need of God, and dare not venture forth to meet life's trials without casting himself upon the Strong for strength. The other would not feel comfortable if he went out of the room in the morning without a prayer; his sense of duty would not be satisfied if he did not bend the knee and repeat over a certain number of time-honoured, or perhaps time-dishonoured, words (for it sometimes happens that frequency of repetition has robbed them of most of their meaning). In the latter case the duty is done, in the former case the privilege is enjoyed. How is it with you—duty or privilege? Do you pray because you can't do without it, or because you would feel condemned if you did without it? By the answer to such a question as this you may judge whether your life is Ishmael or Isaac.

Or, once again, consider the study of Holy Scripture. Both men will probably read the Bible, but the one will read it very much as a wife reads the letters of her absent husband. He will read because he wants to know more of his Father's mind. The other will read his Bible because it is his duty and his

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habit to do so, and the Bible is a book that ought to be read. The one will not be content with his reading unless he finds some spiritual help from it; he expects to get a message from God, and he will not be disappointed. The other is quite content so long as the portion is read; his conscience is satisfied, and there the matter ends.

And here let me sound a note of friendly warning. We are living in a period in which great associations are coming into existence, which have it for their object to induce the regular and systematic reading of the Bible. No one can rejoice more at the success of these Bible unions than I do. It is really very important that our Bible reading should be careful and methodical; but do bear in mind, dear friend, that there is no good thing that has not a special danger, and I would warn you against the possible corruption of this good custom. Take care lest you get into a merely mechanical way of reading a certain portion, and then feeling as if you had done your duty.

Remember that there is no charm in Bible-reading. It is not by running your eye over so many lines, and getting a dim idea of the meaning of so many words, that the soul is fed. We only read the Bible to purpose when we learn something from it, or have some old familiar lesson brought home with fresh power to our hearts. How easily may our systematic Bible-reading become as much a matter of mechanical routine and degrading superstition as the telling the beads of a rosary, or the turning of the wheel of a prayer machine.

Or take again, as another illustration of what I mean, our use of that most holy ordinance to which our Lord hath bidden us in memory of His death. I am one of those who would always earnestly advocate regularity and system, both in the study of the Word, in our daily prayers, and in our participation in the Holy Communion. But sometimes there is a danger connected with and springing from this most desirable regularity. The child of the promise, and the son of the bondwoman, both meet with the Lord's people on the first day of the week to break bread; but here the similarity in their experience ceases. The one goes to the holy feast, because he expects the Lord to meet him there with a special revelation of His love, and to feed him with the spiritual food his soul requires. It would be as natural for him to think of going to the dinner-table, because it was his duty to do so, as to think of attending



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this blessed ordinance merely as a matter of duty. Of course it is our duty to feed our bodies properly ; but it would argue ill for your physical condition if you were in the habit of taking your meals merely because it was your duty to do so. The other attends at this ordinance, as he will tell you, in obedience to the Lord's command. He thinks he ought to go—*it is his duty*; he would feel condemned if he turned his back upon the Lord's table. And when he has obeyed and participated in the ordinance, his conscience is quieted ; he cannot charge himself with any dereliction of duty ; but he does not trouble himself to enquire whether the object of the sacrament has been attained in his case. The habit has been maintained, the duty has been performed. Ishmael seems to be satisfied, and there the thing ends ; but the child of laughter and of joy has had nothing to do with it from first to last.

Or take another illustration. Both the citizen of New Jerusalem and the legalist feel that the work of God has claims upon them, and that it won't do to be idle. The true-born son works because it is his Father's cause ; and his own interests and his Father's are one. Souls are precious to his Father, and so they are precious to him. Hence he works because he wants to do good, and not because he is in duty bound to do something. The more of the spirit of Isaac he has in him the more does he delight in his work. He would not be idle if he might ; for as it was with his Lord so to some degree, at any rate, it is with him, his meat and drink to do the will of his Father.

The other works because he thinks he ought to. The sentiment of the Christian society with which he mingles is favourable to it ; he would lose the respect of those with whom he associates were he idle or indolent. God's word seems to demand it. Very solemn things are said about the unprofitable servant, and he does not want to bring down upon himself the scathing utterance, "Thou wicked and slothful servant." Besides it surely can't be right to be idle in a world where so much needs to be done. We ought to try and do something ; it is our obvious duty, and if we don't perform it our conscience will be condemned. So, it may be, some of you to whom I am now speaking have offered yourselves for work, not so much because love impelled as because duty compelled. You offered your services in some recognized branch of Christian labour, and they have been accepted. Perhaps you became a Sunday-

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school teacher, and as such you have done your work in a very regular and systematic way, and you feel some degree of comfort in the thought that you can no longer now, at any rate, be spoken of as a cumberer of the ground ; for are you not a Christian worker ? But, my dear friend, without unduly disparaging the value of religious activity, let me ask you to remember that the God whom we serve is even more concerned with the quality than with the quantity of the work that we do for Him. First let us consider the character of the work you are doing. Will it stand the test of fire ? for every man's work will be tried by fire. You have conveyed a certain amount of historical, and perhaps of doctrinal, information ; but has your teaching been of such a kind as to win these young hearts for Christ ? You have taught them all about how David cut off the head of Goliath, and how Sampson carried off the gates of Gaza ; but that won't do them much good, will it ? unless they also learn to find in Christ their David, and to see their liberties secured by the resurrection victory of a Stronger than Sampson. How many Christian teachers never seem to get beyond the letter ! never seem to exercise that ministry of the Spirit which giveth life ! Indeed, how can it be otherwise, if our motive is mere duty rather than love for souls and love for God ?

It is the natural tendency of legality to produce a cold and mechanical service ; for the legal spirit ever disposes us, as it were, to drive a good bargain with God. We understand that so much work is expected of us, if we are to continue to enjoy the divine favour. Very well ; then God must have it. But as long as the amount expected is rendered, it does not so much matter what the results of the work may be. We may leave results with God, provided only we furnish the modicum of toil. Thus much of the work done in our day is practically regarded as an end in itself, instead of its being a means to an end, and men are satisfied with working, without ever asking whether the work is really being done ; and hence we have to deplore the scanty results of so much apparently well-meant toil.

And this is not the only ill result of this legal spirit. It not only spoils the work, but it cuts off the blessing from the worker. Our work brings us no nearer to the Lord. We do not perform it in His power nor by His Spirit ; hence we exercise little or no faith, and we enjoy no unction. Instead of being watered ourselves while endeavouring to water others,

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our souls are dry and cold, and our activities seem to make them no warmer. Hence whatever interest we feel in our work is natural rather than spiritual, and when this fails us the work becomes a wearisome drudgery, and we feel what it is to be children of the bondwoman.

And it might be so different! Our work might be like our new life—a child of laughter, an heir of the promises. It might be our very meat and drink to do our Father's business. Service might be joy, and self-sacrifice might be privilege, if only love were law. As the son who is true to the filial instinct finds his father's work a matter of engrossing interest, and works all the better because he is freeborn; as he will not be content with a mere mechanical routine of toil, but keeps the end in view, and is only satisfied with his work when it really contributes to and leads up to it; so the true Christian, who is of the new Jerusalem, finds his work a joy because it is God's work, and does it well just because he is his father's son. And when work is thus done, it brings him who does it all the nearer to God. He cannot face his work without claiming the divine presence; he cannot accomplish it without casting himself on the divine power; and when it is wrought, his very gratitude and joy bring him all the nearer to the God by whom the work has been done. Thus work becomes twice blest. Blest because it benefits others, and produces definite spiritual results; and blest because it brings our own souls into fuller fellowship with God.

These illustrations will, I think, suffice to show the difference between the life of legal bondage and the life of gospel liberty; and now with these contrasted forms of experience before us, "what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir together with the son of the freewoman." The life of mere duty obligation is incompatible with the life of liberty and love. "Cast out the bondwoman." Don't attempt to produce a mongrel Christianity, in which Law and Gospel shall be pretty much mixed up together—the life of compulsion and the life of freedom. Refuse to be satisfied with stern and loveless Duty, and let Love take her place. Make it your habit to consider rather what you may do than what you must do. Think rather, Will this please or will it grieve the Master? than, Is it right or wrong? Look upon His service as a pleasure rather than as an obligation; a privilege rather than a duty. So shall you

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find a joy in performing it that shall prove you to be a true Isaac, a child of laughter.

And thus you shall show yourself also an heir of the promises. All the promises of God will prove yea and amen to you, and you shall laugh for very joy of heart as one by one these exceeding great and precious promises are fulfilled, and as you find out what it is to know the truth, and by the truth to be made free.

And remember above everything else that the real secret of liberty lies in the possession of the promised seed. Well might St. Paul say to these Galatians, "My little children, for whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." Had Christ been formed within them they never could have been reduced to this state of bondage; for Christ would have brought His own filial instincts along with Him, and would have infused into their hearts the nature of the Son.

And it is this that will keep us from legality. Christ our life will never be a slave; Christ our new nature will never submit to a yoke of bondage. But where He dwells there He must bring His own love-law along with Him, and thus raise us up to the liberties of heaven, where love is law and law is love, because God is all in all.

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“What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.”—*Rom. vi. 15.*

CHRISTIAN life, as we pointed out in our last sermon, is exposed to two opposite dangers, against both of which we have to guard with the greatest jealousy and care—*Legality* and *Antinomianism*. Of the latter I desire now to speak.

Both *Legality* and *Antinomianism*, it is true, as they spring from, and are based upon, a misconception of divinely-revealed truth, may be described as doctrinal or speculative errors; but they also have a very important bearing upon our experience and conduct. A man who is under the influence of *Legality* will live his life upon a lower level than that which properly belongs to the true Christian. Even those actions of his which are in conformity with the Divine Law, as to their outward character and complexion, will be destitute of the desired intrinsic quality, and will give little or no pleasure to the God for whom they are performed. For we must never forget that God not merely inspects the outward character, but weighs the inward quality of our actions. He will be pleased only with those good works which are done in such a spirit as He Himself has inspired, and therefore can approve.

He who is under the influence of the *Antinomian* spirit, on the other hand, will come short of the Christian standard in his conduct, and will equally fail to please that God whose workmanship he professes to be, but who creates us anew unto good works, which He has before ordained that we should walk in them. Thus it will be seen that in both these respects erroneous or defective views are likely—indeed, I may say are certain—to induce mischievous results in our conduct and in our lives.

*Legality* springs, as we have seen, from a false conception of the nature of the Christian's relation to the Law. The Law was given in the childhood of the human race for those who were not yet prepared to receive a fuller and more spiritual dispensation of God's love to men. While we are children, says the



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Apostle, though we may be heirs, we are no better than hired servants; we are under tutors and governors until the time appointed by the Father. When the time appointed by the Father arrives, we are under tutors and governors no longer; we are free to act on principle, and in accordance with our own enlightened sense of our proper self-interest. Under these circumstances the true son recognizes the identity of his interests with his Father's. He is no longer constrained by external law, or directed by mere authority; but he is disposed to fulfil his Father's will by an intelligent apprehension of its true character, and of its harmony with his own real interests, and its tendency to promote his well-being. Thus it comes to pass that the Law, instead of being without, takes up its abode within. Instead of being graven upon tables of stone, it is written upon the fleshy tables of the heart, and becomes a living power, in surrendering ourselves to which we fulfil the purposes of God, and rise to our glorious destiny.

As the error of Legality springs from a misconception of the nature of the Christian's relation to the Law—from our failing to see that the Christian is not under the Law, because he is above the Law—so the error of practical Antinomianism arises from a misapprehension of the nature of the relation of that Law which should exist within, to the Law which does exist without. The Law, incomplete though it was, given when a perfect or complete revelation would not have been acceptable to man, or rather when man was not in a position to receive it, was none the less the revelation of the Holy Spirit. It was by the Divine Spirit that the Law was originally communicated to Moses. And as it was originally given by the Holy Ghost, so its character has been exhibited and illustrated—its deep and concealed truths made patent and manifest—by the teaching of the same Holy Spirit, shedding his lustre over the sacred page. Hence it is obvious that there can be no kind of discrepancy, contrariety, or antagonism between the law of God without and the subjective law written within by the same Divine Agent. In other words, the Holy Spirit of God cannot write one thing on tables of stone and another thing on the fleshy tables of the heart. The law within will necessarily be in harmony with the law without, if the law within is the product of the influence and operation of the Holy Ghost.

Hence, although we are no longer under the Law, we are not without the Law. You will remember that St. Paul is careful to

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qualify his own language in this respect. "To them that are without law, as without law"—then he checks himself lest he should be misunderstood—"though not without law to God, but *under law* to Christ." There is no expression in our language precisely equivalent to that which the Apostle here employs. We speak of a man being outlawed, but we do not speak of his being "inlawed." The word would seem to convey the idea of his being under the influence of a law, which binds him, in holy allegiance, to Christ.

Such being our position, it is impossible for us to be true to the law within, and not fulfil the law without. This should enable us to understand the bearing and significance of the Apostle's words in Rom. viii., where he says, "That the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." There has been not a little controversy with respect to the proper significance of this verse. In what sense, it has been asked, is the righteousness of the Law to be fulfilled in us? Some have taken the word righteousness in what is called its forensic sense, and have believed it to refer to the righteousness imputed to the believer, which is regarded by God as a fulfilment of the Law. But against that interpretation of the word is to be set the consideration that the Apostle is here speaking of our *walk*. "Fulfilled *in us who walk* not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." How is the righteousness of the Law to be fulfilled in our walk? Not by the original imputation of the Divine righteousness when we were sinners. That has nothing to do with our walk and conversation or mode of life. It is fulfilled in our walk and conversation when we are true to the law within. A man who is led by the Spirit of God, who surrenders himself to the inward leading and guiding of the Divine Spirit, will live up to the level of the righteousness of the Law, and thus the object of God in condemning sin in the flesh, and in communicating to us a new law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, will be answered.

The law without was weak in the flesh; that is; through the fleshly fallen nature of those to whom it was communicated. The law within is strong in the Spirit; that is to say, through the union with our spirit of that Divine Spirit with whom righteousness is a law of existence, and who prints upon the prepared heart the reflection of Himself, rendering it to some extent at any rate the counterpart of his own moral beauty.

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Thus man is to be prepared for his glorious destiny, and fitted to share the dignity, because he has become partaker of the moral excellence, of the Supreme Being, to whom throughout eternity he is to be united.

Now, in the present passage, the position of the Antinomian is put in the strongest possible language. "What then?" that is to say, What is the conclusion that we may draw from all these evangelical considerations that have been passing before our minds? And it would be well indeed if from time to time we were to ask ourselves the question, "What then?" What is the conclusion that we draw? What of all the privileges which belong to us as members of the Christian Church, and as heirs of the glory of the Christian dispensation? What of the fact that we are purchased, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the priceless blood of Christ? What of the fact that we are set free from the old life of bondage in which our forefathers were wont to live? What of the fact that we are not come to the mount that might be touched, but to mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem? What is the practical conclusion that we are to draw?

Well, here is one suggested to our minds from the point of view of the Antinomian. "Shall we sin because we are not under the Law, but under grace?" If we are no longer bound by the Law of compulsion under which our spiritual forefathers of ancient Israel lived and died—if we are no longer within reach of the terrors of Sinai—why should we be careful about our walk and conversation? May we not freely sin because we are not under the Law?

Let me say, in the first place, that there are very few persons who will maintain this position in distinct terms. For one reason, it is obviously opposed to the teaching of Holy Scripture. It is also clearly and manifestly subversive of all morality. If it could be sustained, then the Gospel would do more harm to mankind than any other system, religious or irreligious, that you can refer to. But there is no intelligent person who will not be slow to assume any such position, or to put any such case as this. It is taken for granted that, in some way or other, the Gospel must be opposed to human sin; those who are under the influence of it must be expected, to some extent at least, to rise above their natural infirmities, and lead a pure and godly life.

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But, my dear brethren, while there is this general consensus of opinion, I am afraid that underneath it all the spirit of practical Antinomianism still lurks in too many of our hearts, and that while we shrink from affirming in given terms that the gospel of God's grace is not designed to set us free from sin, a great many, almost unconsciously, act as though this were really the case.

The position of the practical Antinomian amounts to this. He assumes that the Law, as originally given, set before man a standard too high for him to attain to. God saw it was too high, and that it was necessary to make some diminution of its claims—to bring down the standard of divine perfection to the level of human infirmity. How was it to be done? If man were to be dealt with by an inexorably holy and pure Law, there were nothing for it but the wholesale condemnation of the human family. This must not be. Some scheme must therefore be devised, however cunning and subtle, by means of which the appearance of morality and religion should be preserved, while at the same time a reduction or modification of the claims of God upon the human heart should be permitted and sanctioned.

The result of this would be to render it possible for men to live calmly at their ease and without fear of condemnation; while, at the same time, they failed to rise to the level of that life which the original law of God indicated, and the claims of which are backed by such tremendous sanctions. In plain terms, the substance of practical Antinomianism is this: that the gospel of Christ is a cunningly-devised scheme for rendering it possible for men to lead lives of imperfection and sin with comfort, or, at any rate, without apprehension; whereas, under the Law, such lives could only be led with considerable discomfort and misgiving. We are to go on sinning under the Gospel as under the Law; but whereas under the Law sin brought a sense of condemnation; under the Gospel man shall sin, and yet enjoy immunity from condemnation. Is not this the latent thought with respect to the relation of the Gospel to Law, present to the mind of only too many of us?

And what is the practical result of this? It is that we do not expect our Christian righteousness even to come up to the legal standard in too many respects, and are not distressed and alarmed when it fails to do so. Suppose that some of us who know something about the grace of God, who are instructed

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evangelical Christians, were to put our lives side by side with what we know of the life of those who witnessed to the ancient Law—the life, say, of a Scribe or a Pharisee—would the comparison be in our favour or in theirs? Let us search ourselves for a moment with an honest intention of coming at the truth. Have we not got it into our minds that, the yoke of the Law having been very grievous in the time of the Pharisees, Christ came to make it less grievous, to render it possible to go to heaven comfortably, without putting ourselves to so much trouble, or undergoing so much self-denial, or complying with so many irksome obligations?

Let us descend to details for a moment. The ancient Pharisee made long prayers. We will admit that sometimes he may have been hypocritical and unreal. At the same time we know that a very considerable portion of his time was spent in acts of devotion. Do any of us Christians draw the conclusion that because the Gospel is considered to have taken the place of the Law, therefore a few hurried words of prayer is all that God actually expects of us? Do we excuse ourselves when we have hastily got over the devotions that we conceive to be necessary, with the reflection, “I have other things to think about; the pressure of life is so great that I have very little time for these spiritual duties. Happily I am under the Gospel; I am a child of God, and therefore not under legal restraint, and bound to give so much of my time to prayer, to spend so many hours or days of my life in communion with Him”?

The Pharisee would not have been so ready to excuse himself. He would have said, “It is my legal duty to spend so much time in prayer; if I do not do it I bring myself under the condemnation of the Law.” My dear friend, do you not think our love ought to make us pray more than the Pharisee’s sense of duty made him pray? What is the Apostle’s idea of a Christian’s life in this respect? He says, “Pray without ceasing.” The Christian’s life is to be one continuous prayer; and he who prays because he loves to pray, think you that he will pray less than the man who prays because he feels it to be his duty to pray? Will the Law induce an ampler and deeper devotion than the Gospel? Will the Gospel lead us to less intercourse with God than the Law? If so, it were surely to be regretted that the dispensation of the Law has thus been superseded!

Take another illustration. The ancient Pharisee thought it



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a very important thing to be thoroughly acquainted with his Bible. He studied the Old Testament Scriptures with a great deal of care, paying, no doubt, a large amount of attention to the letter; for the whole genius of Legality is mechanical. The man's religious nature was regarded as a piece of machinery designed to do a certain definite amount of religious work. At the same time, mechanically or otherwise, the work was done. The Bible was studied, and many of the ancient Legalists could repeat large portions by heart. They could tell you all about the various interpretations and glosses, showing that they had spent a considerable amount of time and trouble in endeavouring to ascertain what God had said in the Scriptures.

Dear friend, you are free; you are under the Gospel. Does your freedom lead you to study your Bible less than the ancient Pharisee would have done? Do we spend less time instead of more in the attempt to become acquainted with what God has revealed here of his mind and will? Whereas the Pharisee read and studied the word of God, because he was bound by legal constraint to do so, do we pass the study of it over with slight trouble and attention because, forsooth, we are free from legal obligation? That is what I mean by the spirit of practical Antinomianism.

Take yet another illustration. The Pharisee, as we know, paid carefully a tithe of all he possessed. Out of every pound that belonged to him—if he had lived in a day when money was thus reckoned—he would have paid two shillings into the sacred treasury. He would no more have thought of keeping it back than of robbing his neighbour. I do not know where we shall find a better illustration of the Antinomian spirit than in this matter. Do you say, "Thank God, I am not under the Law! It may have been necessary for the Israelite to pay two shillings out of every pound into the treasury; but now, under the Gospel, I am free from any such obligation"? What, my friend, has thy money become thine own because thou thyself art bought with a price? Is the result of all that has been done for thee, by the infinite compassion of Jehovah, to leave thee under slenderer obligations and more dubious claims than those which were recognized as binding on men who lived under a dimmer dispensation? Who told thee that tithes are no longer required of thee? Nay, has no one told thee that thou and all that thou hast belong to the Lord, who hath bought thee at the price of His own outpoured blood?

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Have you never read those searching words which fell from the lips of Eternal Truth when here on the earth—"Except your righteousness shall *exceed* the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven"?

Observe that if the Christian is living up to his privileges, he will exceed in all these respects the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. He will exceed it by acting in a different way. Very possibly he will not actually spend so many minutes in the day in what seems to be prayer as the Pharisee did; but his whole life will be a prayer; he will be in constant communion and fellowship with God, opening his heart to divine influences, rejoicing in a sense of the divine presence, walking in the sunshine of the divine smile. That is the life that belongs to the real Christian—a life of liberty, but which by this very liberty is lifted above the level alike of legal bondage and of legal righteousness.

So with respect to other things. The Christian whose time, it may be, is largely taken up by other work, which is all, whether secular or sacred (so-called), done for Christ, in the pressure of daily employment, may find it difficult to set apart as much time as the Pharisee, who may not have been so fully occupied, for the study of the word of God. But the Christian who is living in the Spirit will be meditating upon the law of God all the day long. It will be continually recurring to his mind. If it sometimes should happen—and it will not often happen—that he has time only to read a few texts in the morning, that will give him something to think about all day; so that, as he goes about his daily occupation, everything will be sanctified by the word of God and the spirit of prayer. This spiritual tone that possesses his nature will lead him up to a higher level of practical righteousness than that of the strictest Legalist. If our religion does not do this for us, is it other than a specious, plausible system of Antinomianism, which leads us to flatter ourselves that the Gospel delivers us from obligations which are eternal and inexorable in their character, and which spring from the very nature of the relations between God and man?

So with respect to money. One man may find it a far more difficult thing to give a tenth of his income than it would be for another man to give a half. Here is a poor labouring man who earns £50 a year. Out of that he has to support a wife

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and, say, four or five children. Rents are high, and so are prices ; expenses are numerous. Sometimes it is a matter of serious difficulty to make both ends meet. Such a man may possibly give a tenth of all he possesses to the Lord (I do not believe he would be the poorer for it) ; but were he to do so, he would be giving a great deal more, in proportion to his means and his circumstances, than the man whose income may stand at £50,000 a year would be doing, if he gave £40,000 out of that amount. I mean to say that the giving of a tenth in the one case would entail more actual hardship and true self-denial than the giving of so large a proportion as four-fifths in the other.

As Christians, we are raised to the level of the law of liberty, and therefore we shall consider, not what *we are bound to give* by any ancient edict, but what *we may give* in proportion to the amount of stewardship God has entrusted us with, and the circumstances by which we are surrounded. The real Christian is not to think he has discharged the claims of God upon him in this respect when he has paid a paltry tenth. My all belongs to the Lord. I know He does not grudge me the enjoyment of the good things of this life in moderation and thankfulness. He does not call upon me to lead the life of an ascetic. Every man must decide for himself how much it is consistent with his Christian profession to spend upon himself, or, rather, *how little* it is possible to spend without doing anything that might injure his usefulness or militate against the influence which, as a man, he is intended to exercise upon his fellow-men in society ; for we have to bear in mind that anything that savours of assumed poverty and ostentatious asceticism will necessarily be repellant to the natural and not improper instincts of mankind, and will lead men to look upon Christianity with aversion, as the enemy of all the amenities of civilization and culture. We have to take this into consideration in our decision upon such matters, and beware of laying down hard and fast sumptuary laws for other people, or even for ourselves.

But while in these particulars every man must judge for himself what the Divine Will is, he will not judge *by* himself. As a true child of God, he will instinctively refer to his heavenly Father for guidance rather than for commands, fully persuaded that he will derive real satisfaction from the use of his means only in so far as they are laid out subject to

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his Father's approval. And as his first and most important interests are bound up in his Father's kingdom and glory, his chief pleasure in the use of money will be experienced when he uses it to promote these. Instead of Christian charity being regarded as a duty, and other uses of money as a pleasure, his estimate of things will be exactly the reverse of this. It may be necessary for him to spend money upon other things; but the less the better. His true joy will be to give to God. How impossible for such a man to say in his heart, "If I were under the Law, I should have had to pay my tenth; fortunately I am under the Gospel, so I may be content to give a fortieth."

The one question with the spiritually-minded in all such cases will be, "How shall I best promote the glory of Him to whom I belong by the use of my stewardship?" And when this question is honestly asked, and the answer, so far as it is discovered, acted upon, you may be sure that your righteousness will exceed the righteousness of the Legalist, in this respect as in others.

Alas! my brethren, the facts are against us here. What stronger proof can we have of the presence of practical Antinomianism in our midst than the sorrowful fact, which I am afraid the stern rules of arithmetic forbid us to doubt, that the righteousness of the Christian Church does not even come up to, or even distantly approach, the righteousness of the Pharisee in this particular. Just consider how affluent the Christian Church would be, and how liberally supported every charitable, philanthropic, and religious cause, if only Christians, one and all, offered even so small a proportion of their means as a tenth to the Divine treasury.\*

I have been speaking here of what I may describe as the *positive* side of our obligations; now let us turn to the *negative* side. What about *sin*? The specific question of our text is, "Shall we *sin*, because we are not under the law, but under grace?" Yes; what about sin? Is it not very much the

\* We would hope that there cannot be less than one million of professing and possessing Christians in the United Kingdom (adults), probably many more. Setting the rich against the poor, and remembering how many belong to the respectable middle classes, their incomes cannot average less than £100 per annum. At this moderate figure we should have ten millions per annum to spend in the cause of Christ from the offerings of His people only. To say nothing of what might be obtained from nominal Christians, if they came up to the Pharisee's standard in this respect.

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same here as with respect to these various forms of moral and religious duty which we have been considering? Have we not got into a way of thinking that now that we are Christians, certain forms of sin are to be tolerated, because we are not under the Law, but under grace? Are not too many of us ready enough to admit that the gospel of Christ will preclude us from committing grave and serious crimes and offences against public decency and universal right, but that the same power is not to be expected to raise us above those little infirmities, those smaller sins, that belong to human life, and for which we are so ready to excuse ourselves, because our falls are so frequent?

You do not expect a Christian to commit murder, or to steal? Of course not. Why? Because he is a Christian. Then you do not expect that he will ever lose his temper? Oh dear, yes; of course he will! Why should he? Is that also because he is a Christian? Surely you do not mean to tell me that murder is a sin, and temper is not! You do not expect a Christian to bear false witness? Oh, certainly not! Why not? Because he is a Christian. Then you do not expect him to whisper little slanders about his neighbours, or to colour a story by exaggeration, do you? Oh dear, yes; that may be! Why may it be? Is that also because he is a Christian? What! for the same reason I am to be precluded from sinning in the one case, and to be excused for sinning in the other!

If I am under the Law, interpreted by the sermon on the mount, and interpreted there by the Lawgiver Himself, am I not precluded from the one class of offences as much as from the other? Is not the one class of offence as truly a violation of the eternal law of right as the other class. The sin may not be equally flagrant or heinous, but sin it is, and as sin it is equally opposed to the Law of God. Surely it must be. If this be so—if in both cases I am equally offending, or if not *equally*, at any rate, in both cases I am certainly offending against the eternal law of righteousness—will you tell me that in the one case I am scarcely to be condemned because I am a Christian, and in the enjoyment of Christian freedom; whereas in the other case of notorious sin, I am greatly to be condemned for the same reason—because I am a Christian, and in the enjoyment of Christian freedom?

There is some glaring inconsistency here somewhere. Where



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does God draw this distinction between great sins and little sins? Where does He teach us that the grace of God is able to save us from big sins, but nothing in the wide world will save us from little sins? Where are we taught that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ leads us to regard ourselves as dead to the more flagrant forms of iniquity that disgrace human conduct, and as alive to these small peccadilloes which most of us are disposed to look upon more or less indulgently? Where do we find this teaching? In our own wicked hearts; but not in God's word.

"Shall we sin because we are not under the Law?" The answer is an ejaculation of holy horror. "God forbid," exclaims the Apostle. Oh, my friends, if we are living up to the level of true gospel privilege, and in the spirit of the gospel, we too shall be constrained to utter a similar ejaculation, "God forbid."

Let me guard myself against being misunderstood. A man is not an Antinomian because he is overtaken in a fault. A man *is* an Antinomian when he *expects* to be overtaken in a fault. He is not an Antinomian because he commits a sin, little or great. He *is* an Antinomian when he is content with a life in which he knows he is committing sin; when he regards this as the normal condition of Christian experience.

It is to me an amazing fact that in this nineteenth century, when we have our Bibles, and can read and study for ourselves the teaching of the great Apostle, there are to be met with, I do not hesitate to say, hundreds and hundreds of Christians who look upon Rom. vii. as a description of the normal as well as the actual condition of a true Christian man. Mark you, it is not that they regard it as the description of an abnormal and morbid condition into which a Christian man may fall, but they regard it as the normal condition of the true child of God. They believe that the true child of God, ransomed with the precious blood of Christ, and taken possession of by the Holy Spirit, will yet be found saying, "I am carnal, sold under sin." "The good that I would, I do not; and the evil that I would not, that I do." "I find another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into subjection to the law of sin that is in my members." "Oh, wretched man that I am!"

What! a child of God, a citizen of mount Zion, a heir of all the glories of the eternal future, wringing his hands and

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groaning out, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" When Christians are pressed upon the point they say, "Oh, yes; that is our position according to the old nature!" "What is the position according to the new nature?" "Oh, that is in heavenly places in Christ Jesus!" Then which are you—old or new? To the best of our information it would seem as though, while the old nature is living in the prison, and while the new nature is floating in some ethereal region, the Christian—the real human *ego*—is somewhere between the two—now up yonder, and now down here.

Whence come these strange phantasmagoria, this indescribable jargon of unmeaning terms? Surely either we are walking at liberty or in bondage. If we are at liberty, it is because Christ has made us free. If we are in bondage, it is because we have not taken our proper position of privilege, and are living on a level that does not belong to us as servants of the Most High God.

What does Paul say in the preceding verse? "Sin shall not have dominion over me." Will a man say, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" when sin has not dominion over him? Will he say, "The good that I would, I do not; and the evil that I would not, that I do," when sin has not dominion over him? The very fact that such an exegesis of this passage can be for a moment considered as possible is, I much fear, an indication of the presence of the spirit of practical Antinomianism amongst the followers of Christ. The sooner this foul spirit is, by God's grace, exorcised from the Christian Church, the better for the Church, and the better for the world at large.

Do we *expect* to rise above our sins? Do we, my dear brethren, feel astonished and surprised when we fall? And when we fall, do we at once go to the root of the matter, inquiring the cause of our failure? Instead of talking about our old nature in the way I have described, and regarding it as the natural thing that it should carry us along with it in the steps of the old Adam, do we say, "My old nature has been crucified, that the body of sin might be neutralized—rendered inoperative—that henceforth we should not serve sin"? I repeat, Do we go to the root of the matter and inquire how it was we fell; how we permitted ourselves to forfeit for a moment our Christian liberty, and to take upon ourselves a

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fresh yoke of bondage? If such inquiries were more frequent; if we were surprised and astonished at our falls, and searched our own hearts, and tried our reins, exposing ourselves to the keen light of the illuminating Spirit, in order to discover how we failed to use the power that belongs to us, we should very soon see a different type of piety amongst ourselves. And men, detecting the beauty of the Lord in the lives of His followers, would be constrained to bend their knees and own the greatness of that Being who could produce by His influences such moral greatness in His disciples.

One word ere I close. I have spoken of the danger; I should be failing in my duty if I did not also speak of the cure. What is the cure for the spirit of Antinomianism? If I am exposed to real peril in this respect, how shall I rise above it? First, by apprehending in its completeness the great lesson of the cross. Let me not say "the great lesson;" it is more than a lesson. The cross is not only a spectacle that teaches us more eloquently than any other; it is also a secret source of power, from which we may draw forth as we need it such hidden wealth of spiritual strength as shall stand us in good stead in every hour of trial. When you thus apprehend your own need, and, weary of the burden of your sins, and of the tyranny of their dominion, turn your eyes upon Him who hangs on the cross, you discover, first, redemption through His blood from the curse of the broken law. If you have not made that discovery, you will never make any other. Until it takes place, your eyes are holden from discovering the power which the cross of Christ contains. But oh, let me say to those who have made that discovery—as I trust most of you have, my friends—that is only half the revelation that you are contemplating! There is more than this. It is true that the penalty of the law has been fulfilled. It is true that justification has been obtained by the substitution of Christ in our place. Is it less true that our old man "has been crucified together with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed"? Is it less true that Jesus Christ gave Himself for us (O God, carry the word home to our hearts!), "that He might redeem us from *all* iniquity"? from "*all iniquity*!"

^ We can only be saved from iniquity by being redeemed from it. Iniquity obtains a certain right over us by force of the law of habit. Man has yielded himself to be the slave of that which he has voluntarily obeyed. How shall he be

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delivered from this slavery? Only by redemption. When this redemption is provided and accepted, the lawful captive has been delivered, and the prey has been taken from the hand of the mighty.

Now, have we grasped this view of the cross? Do we concentrate our faith upon this point as if it were a reality, and not a fiction? He hath given Himself for me to redeem me from all iniquity, so that the chains of habit shall no longer bind me. My natural infirmities shall no longer exert an imperious sway over me. Has He done it? "*All iniquity.*" That includes your temper, my friend. "*All iniquity.*" That includes your rattling tongue, my sister. "*All iniquity.*" That includes your pride of heart, my brother. "*All iniquity.*" That includes your love of money, my worldly-minded friend, who art yet a Christian. Find it out, whatever it is, the latent evil, the impurity of thought, subtle forms of self-deception; whatever they are, drag them from their hiding-places, bring them out of the cave, as Joshua did the kings of old; and as you bring them out, put your foot upon their necks and cry, "Christ has redeemed me *from all iniquity*, FROM ALL INIQUITY!" No more imprisonment within the ribs of that stern skeleton of spiritual death! No more the plaintive cry of inward anguish, "Oh, wretched man! who shall deliver me?" The joy of life; the boundless strength of resurrection; the inward God-like development that makes man in some sense divine—these are the blessed fruits of redemption, and the glories of the life which by faith in redemption we, through God's mercy, are privileged to lead.

Ere I close, let me ask, Have you claimed the benefit of redemption in any wise? I have spoken to you as Christian-folk; addressed you as those who know the power and preciousness of the blood of Christ. Do you not see that all the teaching I have been endeavouring to give is utterly and entirely beyond your reach unless Christ is yours? If the heart has not been given to Him; if the new life has not been commenced within; if the power of the Holy Ghost has not taken possession of the consecrated temple, and made His own that which formerly belonged to His rival; if the Shechinah of the divine presence has never flashed forth within the hallowed fane—then, my friend, what is thy religious life? Thou must drudge and toil at Sinai. Thou must keep company with Hagar and Ishmael, live in the house of bondage, hugging thy

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chains; and to the end of thy miserable career thou must remain a stranger to that life of liberty and love which belongs to the free-born citizens of heaven.

Are we redeemed? Yes, we are all redeemed. But have we claimed our redemption? That is the question I leave with you, and I beseech you to put it to your own hearts. Remember that it is only the ransomed of the Lord that can walk on the King's highway of holiness. Only they can find that security which is ensured by the presence of Jesus Himself upon the way. "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; for He shall be with them." Only they can experience that joy and holy ecstasy which shall crown the head with songs of triumph. Only they can push forward from strength to strength until, before the Lord of lords, they appear every one of them in Zion. God grant that such a life may be ours! Amen.



## The Peril of Worldliness.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”—1 *John* ii. 15-17.

HOW many a hopeful beginning and fair promise of Christian life is marred and spoiled by worldly influences! How many a flower of Paradise seems to perish in the bud at the deadly touch of the world's cruel frost. Of all the many perils that young Christians need to be cautioned against none are more perilous than those which spring from the influences of the world. It is wise then to call attention to this danger, that, by God's blessing, we may be both forewarned and forearmed against it.

Now it is very important in considering this subject that we should clearly understand who and what the enemy is from whom we have to fear so much, and against whom we have to guard so carefully. I am afraid that a very large number of Christians are so uncertain in their views on this point that they are scarcely in a position to detect the foe, and therefore of course they are badly prepared to meet him and gain the victory over him.

What is this world against which we are so frequently and earnestly warned in Holy Scripture? Not a few Christians have an idea that the word simply indicates certain forms of worldly amusement and dissipation, in which gay and thoughtless people indulge. They suppose that in these consists worldliness, and that to participate in these is to give way to the world. Indeed you might judge from the language of some that these even constitute what Scripture calls “the world.”

Now obviously it cannot be correct to speak thus. The world may have certain peculiar features and characteristics, but such forms of dissipation as we have referred to do not constitute the world, they rather belong to the class of objects specially

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spoken of here as "the things in the world." We must draw a distinction between the world itself and the things that are in it. These are necessarily distinct from each other. It is therefore most important that we should clearly apprehend what that world is which we are here cautioned not to love.

The term employed is obviously a most comprehensive one, suggesting a very complex idea. Its meaning may perhaps best be illustrated by reference to other complex terms with which we are familiar. When you use the word *England*, for example, how many thoughts are suggested to your mind by that word used in its conventional sense. There is first the country itself, so much of this world's surface, to which we give the name of England. But we mean a great deal more than that, don't we? We mean the people who live therein; and we mean more than that. The nation, as it is, is in some sense the product of its history. There are certain features of the England of to-day, moral, mental, and physical, which may be attributed to the circumstances of bygone ages, and to the various conditions, physical, ethnological, social, and political, under which the character of the nation has been formed. There are certain institutions, customs, habits of thought and action, which have all contributed to the formation of our national individuality, and these may all be regarded as comprehended in the complex idea suggested by the term.

It is even such a term that we use when we speak of "the world." Many thoughts are suggested by the word if we form anything like a full and sufficient idea of its meaning. First, there is this material earth—the planet in which we live; but when holy Scripture speaks of the world here and elsewhere it obviously means something more than this outward globe of ours. At the same time do not let us forget that this is the first meaning of the word, because much of what we understand by worldliness is closely connected with, and indeed springs from, the outward conditions of our existence in this respect. We are living in a material world, whose objects appeal to our senses; while the world for which we have been created is spiritual and supersensuous. The world itself is therefore apt to exert a paramount influence over us as a result of the conditions of our present existence; and herein lies, you may say, the very root of worldliness.

But further we mean by the world, not only the place, but the people, or at least some of the people, who live in it. Now, there

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are two classes of persons who inhabit this world. There are some who do not belong to the world, although they live here, and there are others who do ; some who, though their position is on earth, have their home in heaven—who can say, with the great Apostle, that their citizenship is in heaven. These persons have taken Jesus Christ for their King ; they are guided, or desire to be guided, by His laws, and to live in accordance with the maxims and customs which prevail in the heavenly Jerusalem. Their treasure is laid up yonder ; their hopes are hid there ; their truest and deepest joys are derived from spiritual contact with that invisible world. While here on earth they feel that they do not belong to earth, but that in a certain sense earth belongs to them. They look forward to the day when this earth of ours shall be reclaimed by its proper owner, and become the recognized property of our Lord and His saints ; but while they look forward to that period they feel that at present the world is under the influence of a tyrant and a usurper, whose authority and claims they ignore, and whose will they endeavour to oppose ; while they continue to recognize the supremacy of their invisible Lord, and seek to promote His glory. These do not belong to the world at all ; they are in, but not of, the world. They belong already to the kingdom of heaven ; for heaven as a kingdom has as real an existence now as any that can be revealed hereafter.

But there is another class of persons in the world, who are described in a notable passage of Scripture. Of them St. Paul says they “mind earthly things ;” that is, their affections and desires are centred in this world. They do not recognize the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor do they desire to recognize it. They are practically under the authority of him whom Christ calls the prince of this world. His supremacy is practically established in their hearts and wills and minds. He is their ruler ; they shape their conduct in accordance with his influence. He has a court, which bears the name of Society ; he has his laws, which are obeyed throughout Society. There are maxims and fashions established by his influence, which are generally accepted by Society. His mind and will have printed themselves upon Society as it now exists, and have made it what it is.

These two classes exist in this world of ours side by side ; and the two contending policies are continuously developing their resources. The power of God the Holy Ghost is working

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in His Church, and the power of the prince of darkness is working in the world. Through long ages the conflict between these two opposed centres of dignity and power has been continuing, and it will continue until at last the stronger and the better shall win the day; the world shall be crushed, its ruler shall be dethroned, its power be broken, and its kingdom and sceptre pass to its rightful Lord.

The world then, to speak definitely, is composed of those who do not recognize the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor have given their hearts to Him. Those who have not accepted Christ as their King are the children of the world. This general definition is, I think, perfectly correct, as far as it goes.

Now in primitive times the distinction between the world and the Church was very marked. Those who belonged to the world did not even profess to accept the authority of Jesus Christ; on the contrary, they proclaimed outward war against Him and His, and carried it on with cruel persecutions. The world of that date possessed either no religion at all, or a base and grovelling superstition; but those who were called Christians were everywhere despised and spoken against. Under those circumstances it was easy to draw a comparatively hard-and-fast line between the world and the Church.

But soon Satan began to change his tactics. He disposed the world to respect the Church; for he began to see that her strength lay in opposition. He therefore set his wisdom to work to rob her of this power, and he has attempted to compass this end by seeking to confuse her as far as possible with the world, and to obliterate as far as possible that clear, sharp, well-defined line of demarcation which separated the children of God from the children of this world. He is not content with sowing tares in the world which shall grow side by side with the wheat until the harvest, but he seeks to blend the tares with the wheat so skilfully that the superficial observer cannot tell which is which. And, mark my words, any attempt on our part outwardly to separate between the wheat and the tares is altogether premature, and an act of disobedience. Jesus Christ has told us that they are to grow together until the harvest, and therefore we have no right to attempt to separate them.

At the same time, brethren, do not let us ignore the fact that the presence of evil in the Church is the work, not of God, but of the subtle opponent of God, the prince of this world.

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Finding the infant Church too strong for him as long as she was true to her principles, he endeavoured to infuse the poison of the worldly spirit into the true Church by inducing the world to patronize it. When the Roman Emperor and other potentates demanded that all should accept the principles of Christianity, they seemed to be doing a great deal to advance the good cause. As a matter of fact, they were really doing it the greatest harm; for they were introducing more and more of those elements of worldliness into it, of which we see such sad examples in our own day. We see, for instance, kneeling side by side in the same house of prayer, before the same God, the true and the false worshipper. In the same Church membership are those in whose heart Jesus Christ reigns, and those in whose heart Satan reigns.

It is therefore much more difficult now to distinguish between the world and the Church than it was eighteen hundred years ago. At the same time there is such a distinction, and we ought in the first place to recognize that fact, and in the second place look to God for wisdom to discern it as clearly as we can. Let our judgments of others be always kind and tender, and inclined towards the more charitable side; but at the same time there is no true charity shown in shutting our eyes to palpable facts. You do not prove yourselves charitable towards worldly people when you leave them to conclude that you regard them as true servants of God, while you have abundant grounds for believing that their hearts have not been yielded to the Lord. Your truest charity lies in recognizing the facts as they are, and in endeavouring to bring such to realize their position, to turn their back on the world to which they belong, and to submit to Christ, who is their rightful Lord.

Do you ask, How shall we discern between the world and the Church? How shall we make the distinction? I reply, In a large number of instances it is not difficult to discern, because there are a great number of persons whose lives speak for themselves; evidently their object in life is *not* to glorify God, or yield to His claims. You see that they take no real interest in things spiritual; it is difficult to persuade them to attend the services in which you so much delight; nor do they understand your pleasure in them. Under such circumstances it is not only not uncharitable to conclude that they belong to the world, but it is simply silly to do anything else. If their



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- actions show the power and the presence of the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, you are bound to believe the testimony of your senses, and act accordingly.

In another large number of instances, where the lines are not so hardly drawn, a tolerably good idea of the character can be obtained from indications proceeding from the lives of those by whom you are surrounded. When it is apparent that the regal claims of Christ upon the human heart are not recognized; when there is no confession of Christ in either words or actions; when lower objects obviously engross the attention, and nothing in their character or conduct indicates that the will has been surrendered to Christ, and that the life is being lived for the glory of God, then the honesty of true love constrains us to regard such persons as belonging to the kingdom of this world, and as destitute of the new life and life-instincts which belong to citizens of the New Jerusalem.

Nor must we allow ourselves to be misled by the fact that most people are nominally Christians, and have been baptized into the fellowship of the Christian Church. It is only by our own deliberate choice that we can become members of that spiritual kingdom over which Christ is king; and if our will has never made submission we may be traitors and deserters, but real members of the spiritual kingdom we cannot be. Before we can take comfort from the fact of our Baptism we must ask ourselves, Have we been true to our baptismal covenant? Have we taken our stand under the banner of the cross? He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. What was true of the ancient theocracy is not less true of the outward visible church. Those who belong to the outward visible church by Baptism are not necessarily subjects of Christ unless they accept that position, and yield their hearts to Him who is their hearts' true Lord.

Now then do we clearly understand what is meant by "*the world?*" It consists of those whose hearts are not yielded to God, who do not recognize Christ as supreme, but who recognize the customs, habits, maxims, modes of thought and lines of conduct prevalent in that society where the supremacy of Jesus Christ is not practically admitted.

What then is our relation to the world? Christ answers, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." In the world Christ was, but of the world He certainly was not.

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He was not like John the Baptist, an ascetic of the desert, living away from the haunts of men, a life of solitude and seclusion. He went in and out amongst those who invited Him. He was found now at the table of Zacchæus, now at the Pharisee's house. His voice was heard at the wedding feast; He was present at the funeral, where He stood weeping in sympathy with human sorrow. He was a man amongst men, thoroughly human in His human life. At the same time as He went in and out He carried with Him a principle of spiritual isolation, which rendered Him separate from sinners even while surrounded by them. Wherever Jesus Christ was He carried along with Him the spirit of heaven, which was always in contrast with the spirit of the world. For the whole life of Jesus Christ was one of loyalty to the will of the Father, while the lives of the children of this world were continuously disloyal to the will of the Father. He was the standing representative of the Father's authority; while worldly people were as continually in opposition to the divine authority. So it came to pass that He was continually condemning the world, and arousing its hostility.

Now remember, as He was so are we in this world. We are placed here for our trial, and, observe, the presence of worldliness all around us is intended by God to have that effect upon us. By constant contact with the world, and by exposure to the temptations which arise in our daily life, we are to be driven more and more to realize the fact that we are citizens of a heavenly country. We learn thus the necessity of walking by faith rather than by sight, and we find that St. John was right when he said, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith."

But there is more to be said about our relations with the world than that we are in it but not of it. We notice that our text says we are not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world; and it goes so far as to say, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Now, side by side with this direction we must place another text, with which we are equally or more familiar: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." What shall we say then? If God loved the world, are we precluded from doing that which we thank God for having done?

In answer to this enquiry, let me point out that there are two kinds of love by which we may be affected. There is *the*

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*love of benevolence*, and there is *the love of congeniality*. The love of benevolence is that which God felt towards the human family. God loved the world benevolently, and the proof of His benevolent purpose towards the world was the mission of His Son Jesus Christ. Christ Himself loved the world benevolently, and He showed His benevolence by passing through the world as One who was separated from it; not by coming down to the world's level, and allowing Himself to be influenced and affected by the world's spirit. Had He done that He would have shown the very opposite of true benevolent love; but by rising above the level of worldliness, by keeping Himself separate from sinners, and witnessing through the whole course of His life to the Father's sovereign rights in man, Christ showed His true love to the world.

But there is another kind of love—the love of congeniality. This love of congeniality God can never feel towards the world; on the contrary, in this respect the friendship of the world is enmity towards God, and in this particular sense God is the enemy of the world; no kind of love of congeniality can exist between the two. Now, “as He is, so are we in this world.” It is equally impossible for the true disciple to love the world with the love of congeniality. Of those who do we are told that the love of the Father is not in them.

Let me point out to you that not only is there a clear distinction between these two forms of love for the world, but that they are mutually exclusive. He who is true to the one cannot entertain the other; he who insists on maintaining the second cannot exhibit the first. Further, I believe that the one love is intended to counteract and oppose the other. We are to be kept back from the love of congeniality by calling the love of benevolence into play; and just in so far as this true God-like affection for the world is strong in our heart, the danger of anything like this lower love will be diminished.

Let us contemplate a man in whose heart the love of benevolence is strong towards the world. That benevolence will induce him to recognize the world's present position; to bear in mind the truth that the world has rebelled against God, and that God's edict of wrath and condemnation has already gone forth against it. Then the world is in a position of danger: the wrath of God abides upon it. Realizing this—its terrible peril—he will shrink from adopting any attitude towards the world that would be likely to make the world feel as if its

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danger were a mere doctrinal or sentimental unreality, and this will keep him from associating with the world on terms of reciprocal amity. He will go into the world indeed, but it will be for the same reason as his Master, of whom it was stated, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

Yes, we may have to go into the world for the same object ; but let us, as He did, keep this object ever in view, and then contact with sinners will do us no harm. Christ might have wrought miracles of salvation from heaven, but he preferred to come into the world to save sinners ; and so we may go into the world too, provided it is to save sinners. This should be the great work of our lives. But when instead of this we associate with the world as if it were congenial to us, it is far more likely to drag us down than our friendship is to lift it up.

Or, again, we may show the incompatibility of the two kinds of love thus : St. John says, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Now, the only power that can enable me to exercise true benevolence towards the world is the love of the Father present in my soul. This was the secret of Christ's benevolence ; He loved man because He loved God. If, therefore, by condescending to entertain the love of congeniality towards the world I forfeit the love of the Father, I also forfeit the power of doing the world any good. When I go into the world in this spirit, not only am I dragged down myself, and personally injured by worldly influences, but I also lose the faculty of benefiting those whom I should be saving ; and thus, by allowing the love of congeniality to assert itself in my heart, I am precluded from exercising the love of benevolence.

I am afraid it must be sorrowfully admitted that too many professing Christians are leading two distinct kinds of lives, worldly with the worldly, and Christian with the Christian. You would hardly think them the same persons were you to meet them under different circumstances. They cannot be distinguished from the citizens of this world to-day, and they might pass for excellent saints to-morrow. But, dear friends, such people as these really exercise their influence for the world, and not for God. I am sure the world sees through it. They are the very persons who in the long run keep worldlings back from Christ, because they do not carry the love of the Father with them into their worldly relations. Their influence

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tends to drive persons further off from God rather than draw them nearer to Him.

Now this consideration of the incompatibility of these two forms of love for the world will throw a wonderful amount of light on problems that would be otherwise very perplexing. Over and over again practical questions are asked bearing upon our relations with the world, which represent a large amount of painful perplexity upon the part of the enquirers. Young people come to us with questions as to whether they should join in certain forms of worldly amusement, or fall in with certain customs of social life. Perhaps I had better put in a concrete form some of the enquiries which constantly meet me. "Do you think," asks one, "that I ought to go to balls?" "Is there any harm in going to the theatre?" asks another. "Is there any objection to my going to the race-course?" enquires a third. I observe too that the practical answers which some young Christians give to such enquiries are sometimes very arbitrary and capricious. The line, it would seem, must be drawn somewhere, and custom rather than reason, prevalent opinions rather than distinct convictions, are permitted to suggest to us where we are to draw it. We may go, some would say, to the race, but we must not bet. We may go to the pantomime, but not to an ordinary theatrical performance. Some will go to the opera, but not to the theatre. Some will go to a friendly dance, but not to the ball.

Now many of these decisions seem to be perfectly arbitrary, and for my own part I am disposed to be very doubtful of the value of any line that is drawn arbitrarily in accordance with commonly-received opinions or habits of life rather than reasonably and in harmony with some recognized fixed principle. You cannot lay down general rules for others, nor concoct a tabulated statement of what the child of God may and what he may not do. Christians must form their decision with much heart searching on their knees, and with their open Bibles seek for guidance on such subjects, endeavouring to form their opinions rather in accordance with the general principles they discover there than with the dicta of their friends, whether religious or worldly. Now in seeking to be guided by principle it will not be by principles of mere morality that you will be guided. You have more to think of than this. Of course, moral obligations are all that the worldly man can be expected



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to be influenced by, and only very slightly by these. But all this is changed when we become true Christians.

As Christians we no longer consider merely whether a thing is right or wrong; we have to enquire, Will it or will it not be in harmony with that great love-law towards God and man by which in all our conduct we ought to be actuated. Now, it is wonderful, as I have said, how much light this love-law casts on the details of our social life. My young friend, instead of asking the question, Is there any sin in going to the ball, or in going to the theatre? you will ask yourself the question, Is this such an indulgence as will be thoroughly in accordance with the law of the love of benevolence which I have adopted to regulate my conduct in my relations with the world? That will be your enquiry. Turn the matter over from that point of view.

Quite possibly many persons may go into a ball-room, and come out again with a mind perfectly uncontaminated. It is not only possible, but it doubtless very often is the case. But, on the other hand, I am afraid it must be admitted that the customs of the ball-room have contributed and are contributing largely to the production of the very low tone of morality which does largely prevail in the upper classes of society. There is nothing gained by denying facts. We know as a matter of fact that more immorality is to be found in the lowest stratum of society and in the highest stratum of society than is to be found in the intervening classes. The middle classes of the country are, comparatively speaking, pure. Immorality of that particular kind exists most largely in the two extremes of the social scale. Looking at the lower classes, it is easy to detect the demoralizing agencies. The public-house, with its degrading influences; the low places of amusement and entertainment provided for the poorest; and the huddling together of whole families in a single room—these causes tend to produce social immorality amongst the poor.

Turn from the poor to the rich. You cannot shut your eyes to the conclusion that the habits of society in the higher social circles tend exactly in the same direction; and here, as in the other case, effect follows cause. The way in which young people are thrown together through long nights of folly and dissipation; the premium upon vanity and display; the frequent opportunities offered for flirtation and other forms of levity, which are opposed to true modesty; the conditions of social excitement,

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which are so suggestive of sins of thought and desire—these features are characteristics of the ball-room, and all tend to produce that low state of morals which, I am sorry to say, prevails in the highest, as much as in the lowest, class of society.

The child of God then will be led to say, "I am living by the law of benevolence. My desire is to show a practical love to my fellow-creatures; I therefore cannot do anything opposed to the claims of this love-law by which my life is guided. If, therefore, I find that any particular form of amusement or diversion tends in the direction of moral danger, and is obviously productive—not perhaps in my case, but in numerous other cases—of evil consequences, then it is my plain duty to abstain from joining in it, or in any way sanctioning it."

Further: not only is social impurity fostered by such customs, but also other forms of evil, not less opposed to the mind of God, which are referred to in this particular passage. St. John, in speaking of the things of the world, mentions first the lust of the flesh, of which I have spoken; but then he goes on to mention the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, and says all these are "not of the Father, but of the world." If they are of the world, we cannot love them because they are not of the Father; they are opposed to the new feelings and sentiments of our life. Now, eliminate these three things from the ball-room, and how much have you left? Take away the lust of the flesh: let our young men and young women dance separately, for instance, so that there shall be no temptation to any form of impurity, no excitement of unholy thoughts or desires; take away the dressing and adorning of ourselves, the display, the flippancy, the flirtation, the love of flattery, the seeking for admiration; in other words, "the lust of the eye, the pride of life;" take away all these elements, and how much is left? Why, just this—You sit down at the piano and play a waltz, and your sisters dance round the room! Who could find fault with that? There is, of course, no sin in the act of dancing; but how many would be satisfied with this remnant of the ball-room? The plain truth is, when you reduce the thing to that level, you have eliminated from it the very elements that, I fear, constitute its attractiveness; you have practically removed its *raison d'être*.

The Christian, acting from this point of view, would ask, "Do these things contribute towards anything that I have renounced?"

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Even if I could trust myself to exercise sufficient self-control to rise above vanity, and flirtation, and impurity of thought, and love of admiration, would others be likely to do so?" If the answer is "No," then your course is clear, because you are not acting on the principles of mere morality, but in accordance with the claims of true Christian love.

Take the same ground with respect to the theatre. I suppose there is no radical evil connected with histrionic art; nor do I say that the mere performance of a dramatic part is in itself a sin. Some people have a great aptitude for acting, and the exercise of that aptitude I cannot count an evil in itself; but there are many things that as a Christian I have to take into account. I have to look at things as they are, to consider the baleful influences which seem to surround our theatres, the immorality that fills our streets in their vicinity; I have to think of the hapless outcasts that swarm by the thousand in the Strand and the Haymarket around these very institutions; I have to consider the character of the drama in our days, and whether its tendency is elevating or otherwise; I have to consider whether the stage can be shown to be doing real good, or whether it is not doing harm. Nor is even this all. When I have duly considered these accessories, there still remains the main question, which I will state thus: Should I like to see my own sister acting on the stage, even in one of our grandest Shakespearian dramas, in a part that necessitated the representation of sin, or a part that necessitated the laying aside, for the time being at any rate, of that proper delicate modesty which we must needs prize so highly in woman? Should I like to see my own sister acting before a thousand people in a love scene? Should I like to see her acting in a love scene where adultery is involved in the plot? Then if not, the matter at once presents itself to me thus: Can the playing of such a part have a wholesome effect upon the person I employ to minister to my pleasure by occupying such a position? Once let me conclude, in sound quiet judgment, that the profession of an actor or actress is one of special temptation, and that in order to minister to my pleasure these persons put themselves in abnormal and unnatural relations to each other, of a kind to diminish that proper modesty which belongs to women, and break down those barriers which God in social life has established as a safeguard against sin, then in such circumstances the law of the love of benevolence decides

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the case. No further argument is necessary. How can I employ persons to occupy such positions of temptation, and to expose themselves to such evils for the sake of my personal gratification !

I refer to these two subjects only to illustrate this principle that I have laid down, and to shew what light it may cast upon practical problems of life. How many questions of this kind would solve themselves if we only understood and bore in mind that God intends us to love the world intensely with the love of true benevolence, and that for that very reason we must avoid all that might militate against its true well-being, though in doing so we may expose ourselves to its contempt.

Now you will see how much better it is to be guided in our conduct in these matters by Christian principle, than by mere ethical obligations on the one hand, or by the dicta of Christian friends, or the customs of Christian society on the other. How much better to ask, "Will this, or will it not, promote the well-being of mankind?" than to feel one's way about with timid and irresolute steps amidst the mazes of casuistry, asking over and over again, "Is this right, and is the other wrong?"

But observe, this love of benevolence, while it renders us indisposed to participate in social customs which seem to be of a questionable tendency, will not induce us to turn our backs upon the world altogether. It is selfishness, and not true love, that would lead Christian men to retire within the hermit's cave, or to immure themselves within the walls of a monastery. And it is selfishness rather than true love that disposes some Protestant Christians, who have no monastic tendencies, to turn their backs on former friends and acquaintances, as if they now no longer took the least interest in those, whom in worldly days they professed to love and care for. As we have already seen, like our Master, we shall go into the world to save sinners; but it will be for this object, and not to seek for self-gratification there.

Hence in our intercourse with the world we shall select those opportunities in which we shall least find ourselves involved in a worldly atmosphere—those occasions on which the characteristic features of worldliness are least displayed, and in which therefore we shall least be in danger of compromising ourselves. In fact we may indicate the line of true Christian expediency thus: We shall ever seek in our intercourse with the world to obtain *the maximum of influence*

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*with the minimum of compromise*, or of anything that may be mistaken for compromise. We shall seek to increase and extend our influence over worldly people by habits of courtesy and friendliness; but we shall shrink from condescending to any forms of conduct that may diminish our real influence or involve a concession to the worldly spirit. But if we go into the world simply for the sake of self-gratification, we shall soon find ourselves involved in the maximum of compromise along with the minimum of influence. For remember worldly people frequently have very much more correct views than you would perhaps expect, of what is and what is not consistent with a Christian profession. And worldly people usually despise those who, while making a profession of Christianity, live practically on the world's own low level.

But I cannot let you go without referring to the solemn closing words of the verse: "The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof." Do I speak to any here this morning who are of the world, who have not recognized the supremacy of Jesus Christ, nor yet given their heart to Him, and who are kept back from doing so by their love for the world, and for the things of the world? Dear friends, let me say to you to-day, Reflect for a moment or two upon the inevitable; think, I beseech you, of what it is that lies before you. Do you complain, "I shall have to give up the world if I come to Christ"? Yes, my friend; but you will also have to give up the world if you don't, and long before you give it up probably the world will have given up you. How would you like that? Give up the world, and find in place of it the kingdom of God, that new world that is never to pass away; this is the claim of Christ. Turn your back upon God and His kingdom, and cling to the world until you find that you can no longer keep the thing you have chosen. This is the claim of Satan. To which will you accede?

The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, and you cannot keep it, do what you will. Go down to the sea-shore and fill your hand with sand. Grasp those grains as tightly as you can, but you find that you cannot retain them. The sand is still slipping away, slipping away, till by-and-bye nothing is left. And such are the acquisitions of life; you grasp them, but cannot keep them. The world passeth away, and the lust thereof.

You love it very dearly, do you? But does it love



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you? What does it care for you? Ah, false and heartless world, how many of thy victims hast thou deceived, and left them stranded and shipwrecked on the extreme shore of time! Oh, hollow, fading, fleeting world, is it for thee men and women will barter an everlasting heaven? Passeth away! The funeral knell rings out over the plains of time? Passeth away! passeth away! The dreams of early boyhood, the hopes of youth, the promise of vigorous manhood, when with the firm steps of a determined will we push on in life's highway—our minds made up to carry all before us—what do they all end in? As the years roll on our hopes dissolve, friends fall off, and the shadow of death is cast across our path. Pleasures cease to please, and employments lose their interest. It passeth away—all that we loved, and valued, and clung to, and vainly do we attempt to clutch the receding phantom.

What is happening around us here to-day? Women who have outlived their youthful comeliness make futile appeals to certain ingenious operators, who have raised the art of rejuvenation to a science, and who by a wonderfully skilful manipulation of dyes and cosmetics, by duly painting and furbishing and enamelling the human person now well-stricken in years, contrive to impart a sort of travesty of youthful bloom which can deceive no one except those who affect it. Poor things, they are *passées*, and they know it, though they do the very best they can to conceal the very unpleasant fact. How melancholy it seems that they cannot keep what they seem disposed to prize so dearly; but it's all no use; the sand slips through their fingers, the world passeth away, and the lust thereof. And, dear young friends, it will pass from you too.

But there is something that does not pass away. He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever! For that will is the law of heaven, and the harmony of eternity, and he who does it becomes partaker of the divine stability and participator in the divine triumph for ever! Oh, think of that! The world dissolves—the vain pageant melts into nothingness—but the portion of him who doeth the will of God, crowned with its wealth of blessedness, extends beyond the furthest limits of our thoughts when God is all in all.

## “Let us Keep the Feast.”

“Even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us : therefore let us keep the feast.”—1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

I DARE say that there are many of us who feel the force of these pronouns to-night as we never did before: “Christ *our* passover is sacrificed for *us*.” The great truth, that Jesus Christ has died as a sacrifice for sin, may be accepted by the mind as an historical fact or as a theological verity, and yet the heart may remain unmoved and our spiritual condition unchanged. But when, moved by a consciousness of need, we see in Jesus Christ *our* Passover; when we discern in Him the very Paschal Lamb, whose blood was shed for *our* sin; when by faith we dip the hyssop in the basin, and sprinkle the blood on the lintel over our head, that it may be between God’s righteous judgment and our ill desert; and on the door-posts, that it may be between us and the world, which is condemned already—then, and not till then, do we begin to understand the full meaning of these words: “Christ *our* passover is sacrificed for *us*.” The redeeming work of Christ brings no real advantage to us until we thus appropriate the benefit, dwelling upon its relation to our individual needs; until we can say, each for himself, “Christ my Passover is sacrificed for me.”

But St. Paul calls our attention to a practical inference that we are to draw from this recognized fact, and I would do the same. “Therefore,” exclaims the Apostle (and remember that “*therefore*” loses its force unless we have appropriated to ourselves the benefit of the Paschal sacrifice), “let us keep the feast.” When we know that for us the Paschal blood has been shed, that word “therefore” indicates a logical conclusion which must follow from gospel premises; and this inference is so patent and powerful, that there is no escape from it. “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us : therefore let us keep the feast.”

And what that feast is to be we may learn from the consideration of the Paschal feast to which our text refers. That Paschal feast was intended to foreshadow the perpetual

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feast which belongs to Christian experience, and to indicate its distinctive features. They kept a feast on a single occasion, but we are privileged to keep a feast all our lives through.

But ere I proceed to point the lessons suggested by this parallelism, it will not be out of place to say a few words about that sacred and spiritual feast in which we Christians are privileged to participate, and which is intended to bring vividly before our mind the divine provision for human need. He who knows our human infirmity, and understands how apt we are to forfeit our highest privileges because we don't sufficiently value them, has of His own infinite love appointed a special ordinance, the object and aim of which is to present to our minds more eloquently than any words could speak, in the striking and impressive language of symbol, the purposes of God with regard to our present experience and our relations with Himself.

When the Apostle calls upon us to keep the feast, I do not suppose that he was actually referring to the communion feast. Very likely no thought of it may have been present to his mind, but he was speaking of that experience, to the necessity and importance of which our sacramental feast bears witness.

I believe that when our Lord instituted the Holy Communion, He designed that this blessed ordinance should present to us in a vivid and forcible manner an idea of what the true character of our Christian life was to be; for it is not too much to say that our whole life is intended by God to be one continuous feast, and that, in both the two senses in which the word is used.

First, the word suggests the idea of a sacred season, a festival; and thus we are taught that our lives are to be sanctities. The old distinction is no longer to be drawn in our lives between things secular and things sacred; all is to be sanctified.

And, in the second place, the word suggests the thought of enjoyment. Our life is to be a feast; that is to say, a season of continuous happy festivity. Not only when we reach that better land, and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb; not only then are we to be privileged to feast with Him. The feast of heaven begins on earth, and only those who know from their own experience what it is to feast with Jesus now will ever feast with Him yonder.

In both these senses then our lives are to be festal, and this holy ordinance has been appointed as the special feast of the Christian, in order to keep ever before our minds the true idea of what our lives are to be and will be if we live up to our

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privileges. We shall not do wrong then in spending a few moments in considering the import and efficacy of this ordinance, so that in understanding how to keep our sacramental feast we may be the better fitted to keep the feast of the Christian life.

And here, first, you will observe that, as the Jewish Passover was a continuous commemoration of a deliverance wrought out for Israel, so the Holy Communion, whenever celebrated, is designed to be a perpetual remembrance of that wonderful deliverance which has been wrought out for us on the cross of Calvary. Do we need any reminder? We may at first be disposed to say, "Surely not; never can we forget that." But, as a matter of sorrowful fact, it must be admitted that human gratitude is apt to be short-lived, and only too many of us Christians in our daily lives do get out of sight of the cross; and when we do, the true love-power very soon passes away from our life and experience.

This feast then was instituted by One who was perfectly conversant with our human frailty, for a perpetual memory of His most precious death and passion, and in order that, if ever we are in danger of forgetting how much we owe to His dying love, we may straightway be brought back again, full in view of His cross; and further, in order that, being thus from time to time brought face to face with Calvary, we may obtain fuller and deeper views and clearer apprehensions of what that cross of Calvary really imports, and of the benefits that redemption brings within our reach.

So use it, dear young Christians, and never be tempted to think it a small thing that God has made this provision to meet your need, nor allow yourselves to imagine that you can well dispense with that which Jesus Christ has seen to be so necessary for you. You may rely upon it, He knows your human nature better than you do your own; and if He, as His last act ere He left His Church, instituted this sacred ordinance, you may be very sure He attaches considerable importance to it, and that we cannot neglect it with impunity. You will find that, although at this moment your hearts seem so full of joyous love and gratitude to Jesus, who died for you, that it scarce seems credible that you could ever forget His benefits or need a reminder; yet as time wears on other things will obtrude themselves on your attention, and there may be a danger—God grant you may never give way to it!—of your

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losing the freshness of your first love of Jesus, in which you are now rejoicing.

It is in order to guard against this danger that the Lord has instituted this blessed sacrament; and don't think that you have communicated rightly unless your memory of the cross has been, so to speak, quickened and refreshed; unless your spiritual sensibilities have been stirred within you, while you have approached and gazed once more upon this great sight; unless you have once again been moved to pour out your soul in heartfelt utterances of love and devotion to Him by whose death eternal life is yours.

The first object then of this sacred feast is commemoration, as it was the object of the ancient Passover; and in this sense I say to you, in the words of the text, "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast." Let us keep it in order that we may remind ourselves of that love which we are too apt to forget, and which, if we do forget, our spiritual condition is sure to suffer for it.

But once again notice that the Paschal feast was furnished by the very lamb whose blood secured the safety of the household. The lamb was not only a paschal victim, but was also the paschal feast; and of this lamb, whose death had been their life, the Israelites were taught to partake. They were to gather together around the table all the members of the household, and all were to partake of the lamb whose death had been their life.

Now here observe we have our second lesson, and it is one of such importance that our Lord will not trust it to mere words. This great truth is set forth in Holy Scripture in language as powerful as it was possible to employ. But this was not enough. Its extreme importance must be witnessed to by an outward sign that shall speak more forcibly than words. Jesus, Himself the victim, is Himself the feast; Jesus is Himself the food on which His followers have to feed.

Now let me point out that if the only object of the Holy Communion had been a commemoration, it would have been enough for this purpose that the bread should be broken and the wine should be poured forth. The purposes of commemoration are abundantly answered so soon as these two acts have been performed, and what follows after this has nothing commemorative about it; for there was nothing in the fact of our Lord's crucifixion to answer to the eating and the drinking.



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Why then are we not only to break the bread and pour out the wine, but to receive both? Obviously for the purposes of commemoration this was quite unnecessary; for, as we all know, the body of Jesus Christ was never devoured by His enemies. It was broken, and the blood poured forth; and as that was all that happened so it is all that we can commemorate. To eat and drink the body and the blood would be superfluous and even revolting to our sentiments if commemoration were the only object of this sacrament.

It is perfectly evident then that more than this is intended by this ordinance. As I have said, in ordaining this feast Christ bears witness to a truth which is of the last importance to us in the whole course of our spiritual experience; and it is this, that as our physical bodies are continuously dependent upon the material world, and as we are constantly drawing our supplies from Nature without us, and cannot live unless we do so, even so that new life of the human spirit, quickened by the Spirit of God within our being, which commences at our new birth, is constantly dependent upon a divine supply; and only as we appropriate that supply to ourselves can we be strong in the Lord, and grow in grace, and accomplish the work that has been assigned to us, or attain to the prize of our high calling.

I would therefore say to you, Bear this in mind as the most important feature of the Holy Communion. You draw near there to feed upon the Lord Jesus Christ Himself "by faith with thanksgiving," to satisfy your needy soul out of His fulness.

And do remember that this Holy Communion is designed to impart, as well as to symbolize, this spiritual sustenance of the new life; for it is a means of grace as well as a sacrament or a sign of God's love. But in order to receive the real benefit which it is intended to convey, something more is needed than the mere partaking of the consecrated elements. The outward act is specially designed to enable you to concentrate your mind upon the divine provision, to bring your faith to bear upon the thought that God is then and there through Jesus Christ imparting the divine nature to you, that God is then and there through Jesus Christ communicating the divine life to you; and as you bring your faith to bear upon that act of God's love towards you, you will be indeed a communicant. For the bread which we break, is it not a common participation in the body of Christ? and the cup that we bless, is it not a common participation in the blood of Christ?

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But very likely the question may occur, "Why the body and blood?" What is meant by the words "This is my body, and this is my blood"? I reply, It is sufficiently evident that the words must be used in a mystical and spiritual sense. For if we could have actually partaken of the material body and the material blood of Jesus Christ at the time of His crucifixion, that would have produced no inward or spiritual change, no moral revolution in our nature. The substance so received would have simply assimilated itself to our bodily tissues in the usual way, and there the whole thing must have ended.

Similarly, if a supernatural act of transubstantiation were to transpire at that holy table, and if that bread were actually changed into the body of Jesus Christ, and that wine into His blood, the mere reception of these would leave us, so far as our moral and spiritual condition is concerned, just where we were before. This being so, we are constrained to look beneath the surface for the proper significance of these sacred but familiar expressions—the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us find our answer by observing the use of similar language elsewhere. We are taught in the ancient Law, and that not once or twice, that "the life is in the blood;" and we are taught by St. Paul that the nature is in the flesh. You will remember his words in 1 Corinthians xv.: "There is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds." The nature of the animal organism is, you may say, contained in the flesh, just as the life is in the blood. We are able to form a conclusion as to the nature of an object by considering a portion of the flesh which is submitted to us.

The use of this language then surely brings us to this. As I receive the blood it is my privilege by faith to drink in the life of God which flows through the Incarnate Saviour into my soul, and as I receive that bread it is my blessed privilege to receive more and more fully that new and divine nature in which my humanity is to express itself, and in the formation of which I am to be raised to my true character and level of experience. For thus the attributes of perfection which belong to the Deity are communicated through the man Christ Jesus to my poor frail human nature, making me partaker of the divine. Thus eating His flesh and drinking His blood, we are privileged to grow up "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ Jesus."

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And now I will ask you to observe the part that the ordinance plays in contributing to this great end. First, it brings our faith to a definite issue. We all know too well how apt faith is to lose power when it is not very definitely exercised. We may believe that Christ is to dwell in our hearts *by faith*, and that this is to be the source of all power for true godliness, but are we likely to exercise our faith definitely and frequently upon this point? If it is by faith that He is to dwell in our hearts, obviously there is a danger of our losing His indwelling presence, and all the benefits it brings along with it if faith be not in active exercise. Now the Holy Communion, properly understood, brings us right up to this point. Its symbolism points us to the divine provision, while our part in the matter suggests the very spiritual attitude which it is so all-important that our souls should assume. The outward taking and eating appeals to our faith, calling upon us then and there to receive and appropriate to our spiritual nature God's wondrous provision to meet its needs. Our faith is brought by the sacramental act to a definite issue, just as the magnifying-glass collects the diffused rays of the sun, and projects them on a definite focus, thus causing a heat that will kindle a flame. I am to believe that the Holy Ghost is now actually imparting to my spiritual nature more and more fully the life and nature of God through the man Christ Jesus, and according to my faith it will be done unto me.

Thus I would further point out that, in the second place, while the ordinance stimulates my faith, it gives my God the opportunity of conveying to me the very blessings of which the ordinance is a symbol, and thus the ordinance becomes a means of effecting those spiritual results which its imagery suggests. Does not this seem more reasonable than to describe the sacrament as the channel through which, on God's side, grace passes into the soul? God needs no channel; He is ever ready by His Holy Spirit to deal most directly with His creatures; but God does require that His creatures should be in an attitude of believing receptiveness, and He has ordained the ordinance to bring this about. When then, in the obedient use of the ordinance, this state of soul is induced, God can at once communicate to us the specific blessing of which the ordinance is at once the symbol and the pledge, and thus we find in the ordinance that His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood is drink indeed.

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This same consideration also perhaps suggests the true answer to the question, Is it only in the Holy Communion that we thus receive Christ? Whenever our faith is concentrated upon this particular truth no doubt the divine supply is vouchsafed; but as this ordinance has been ordained specially to lead our faith up to this point, so we may believe that this is God's regular and, so to speak, normal manner of feeding His people.

But it is time to return to the Paschal feast, and the lessons that it offers on the subject of our Christian experience; for you will remember that I said, a short time ago, all our lives are to be in a certain sense a feast, and not only those short portions of them which we spend around the holy table. Here we may learn much as to the character of our lifelong feast from considering what we know of this Jewish festival of the Pass-over, to which St. Paul here refers.

What then were the characteristics of the Paschal feast? Let us take them one by one. First and foremost, it was *the feast of safety*. The destroying angel was passing through the land of Egypt, the drawn sword was in his hand, the work of death was being done; but the happy Israelites were able to feast in safety, because they knew that they were safe under the blood-stained lintel. Bear that in mind, dear friends, it was because *they knew*. They did not hope about it or think about it, but they knew they were safe. How did they know? Why did they feel safe? How came it to pass that they were able to feast at all amidst such terrors? Surely it was because they had God's word for their security. "When I see the blood I will pass over you," "and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you."

My friends, think for a moment how impossible it would have been for them to feast if this had not been secure. You who are a mother ask yourself whether you could have feasted if you had been uncertain as to the safety of your first-born son. Suppose that you had known that the angel of death was going to pass through the land that night, and you had not been sure as to the fate of your own child, could you have kept the feast? But the blood was shed, the life was safe, and so they feasted.

And so it must be still. If your life is to be a festal life you need a similar consciousness of safety; if you have not that you will never keep the feast. There are a good

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many religious people who seem much more like keeping a funeral than keeping a feast. A very lugubrious life is theirs, while they are always complaining of their doubts and their fears. The real truth is they are not quite clear in their own mind as to whether they have sprinkled the blood, or, if they have done so, they do not take to themselves the full comfort which belongs to those who have; they don't rest upon the distinct declarations of eternal truth—"I will pass over;" "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life." We must thank ourselves for our own miseries if we insist on doubting the divine faithfulness. We strip the table that love has spread, or at any rate deny ourselves the pleasures of participation, when we decline to accept and rejoice in the provision which has been made for our safety.

But this was not all. I next observe that the feast which the Israelites kept was a feast of *deliverance*. They were happy not only because they were safe, but because they were free. Yes, they were in the "house of bondage" still; the Egyptians were all around them. Pharaoh might still exert all his tyrannous power against them, but in their hearts they already felt the throbbings of a new and wondrous national life; and their glad anticipations told them that, whatever appearances might say to the contrary, from that moment they were free.

And it is even so with us. Beloved children of God, remember Romans vi. is just as true as Romans v. The fifth chapter tells us about our justification; the sixth chapter tells us about our deliverance—deliverance from the power and tyranny of sin. The moment that Israel was reconciled to God by the Paschal blood, that moment Israel was free from the tyrannous power of Pharaoh. The enemy said, "I will pursue." He might pursue. The enemy said, "I will overtake;" but God in His providence said, "Nay, you never shall." And so He interposed the pillar of fire and cloud, and the pillar was darkness to the Egyptians but light to the Israelites, and so the one came not near the other all night, because God was responsible for their liberty.

Remember this, dear child of God, that the moment you trust yourself fully and utterly into the hands of Jesus the chains of your captivity are snapped; you are the slave of sin no longer. It is your blessed privilege to sing, "The year of jubilee is come; no more for me the bondage of the oppressor; no more for me the land of captivity, the iron furnace, the cruel



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taskmasters ; I am free. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death, and it is my glorious privilege to come forth out of the 'house of bondage,' and to find myself standing in the land of liberty, even as the Israelites stood triumphant on the further shore of the Red Sea."

Remember, I don't say to you young Christians that you are to have no more temptation ; that is quite a different matter. But I do say you are no longer under the dominion of sin. The Israelites had not done with enemies when they crossed the sea, but they had done with slavery ; and so it is with us. Indeed, they had hardly got out of Egypt before Amalek attacked them ; and you will not have gone very far along your spiritual journey before temptation will attack you. But I want you to see that it is a very different thing to be attacked by Amalek and to be kept in the slavery of Pharaoh. Can't you see the difference between the state of the Israelites beneath the tyrant's yoke, and the position of the same Israelites when, journeying through the wilderness, they are attacked by the aggressor ? From the hand of Amalek they had to be delivered by the same God that had delivered them out of the power of Pharaoh ; but observe the difference between the two cases. In the one case they are in a condition of slavery, being gradually destroyed and exterminated ; and in the other case they are in a condition of liberty, fighting to ensure their liberty and to hurl back the attack of an aggressor.

And even so now you are free if you are in Christ ; but you will have to guard your liberties by employing the same divine power that set you free to defend you against the foe. But do remember it is only as we realize our liberty that we can feast. No man can feast when he is crying out woefully, "O wretched man that I am ! who will deliver me from the body of this death ?" Guard your liberties, dear children of God, or you can never know the true joy of the Paschal feast ; for it is the feast of the free-born citizens of the New Jerusalem.

This leads us on to another consideration. It was the feast of *separation*. The Egyptians were not allowed to keep it. Up to that time the Egyptians and the Israelites had lived as neighbours, but now there was a line of separation to be drawn between the Israelites and the Egyptians. The stranger and the foreigner, or even the hired servant, were not to eat of the feast, because it was the Lord's passover. Remember, if

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there are any of you here who have not sprinkled the paschal blood, you have no right at the table of the Lord ; the feast is not for you.

Nor can you participate in that feast of life which the Christian is privileged to keep ; for you belong to the world, and the world has no part in the Paschal feast. The world has a feast of its own ; its children feast on ashes. They seek to slake their thirst with the vintage of Sodom and the grapes of Gomorrah, but they cannot share the Christian's feast or participate in his deep and true joy. But to you, my Christian brethren, let me lay stress on the consideration. Your feast is a feast of separation, and you cannot properly enjoy it unless you are content to be separate from the world.

I meet with not a few Christians from whose life all festal happiness seems to have departed just for this reason. They are not willing to be separated, and so they cannot keep the feast. They shrink from being considered peculiar, and so they can no longer be a kingdom of priests, the Lord's own peculiar treasure. Hence their enjoyment of the Lord is impossible, while they are spoilt for the enjoyment of the world ; and thus, while they seek to find a place at both tables, they find that they are not able to feast at either. They can't rejoice in the Lord ; they can't be merry with the world. Oh, dear children of God, if you desire to be real Christians, be whole-hearted Christians ; and remember that the Paschal blood is on the door-posts as well as on the lintel, cutting you off from the world as well as from the judgment of God ! If you would keep the feast, learn, like St. Paul, to regard the world as crucified to you by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. While you are crucified to it, so shall you be able to keep the feast.

But to return once more to the Passover. Let me point out that it was not only the feast of safety and the feast of deliverance and the feast of separation, but it was also the feast of *purification*. And to this the Apostle here calls special attention, "Not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness." Careful search was to be made, and all that was leavened was to be excluded from their habitations. And here is a very important lesson for us. We may be delivered from the tyranny of sin, and yet how much of latent evil may still lurk within ! Perhaps we are ignorant of its presence until the Lord Himself reveals it to us, and then we

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are quite astonished at the discoveries that we make. We have need to pray with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my thoughts : and see if there be any wicked way in me."

And it is encouraging while we seek for inward purity to know that this is one of the special offices of Christ through the Holy Spirit. He sits like a refiner and purifier of silver, and purifies the sons of Levi, so that they may offer to Him the sacrifices of righteousness. When He brings His clear light to bear on His people, how much of latent evil do they not unfrequently discover—pride, vainglory, discontent, selfishness, impurity, crookedness of motive, wilfulness, self-seeking ! Ah ! these are mournful discoveries ; but, thank God, He who shows us the old leaven can give us grace to purge it away, and we must be satisfied with nothing short of this, if we would keep the Paschal feast.

I remember hearing a friend of mine describe what he himself once saw in Palestine, and of all places in Palestine in Nazareth, and of all places in Nazareth in a carpenter's shop there. The carpenter would not allow him to witness the search in the house lest his presence should defile the home ; but he allowed him to enter the shop and witness the search there. The man went about the work with a will ; he was evidently thoroughly in earnest ; he girded up his loins as if he had a day's work before him, and then proceeded to search with the utmost zeal.

Carefully and conscientiously he turned over every board, he moved all his tools, he swept out the whole place, he opened every drawer, looked into every cupboard ; there was not a crevice or a cranny in the wall that was not inspected lest there might be a tiny crumb of leaven anywhere in the shop. As he drew towards the close of his search my friend suddenly heard him utter an exclamation of horror, and looking round he saw him standing as though he had seen something most alarming. If he had found a viper or a cockatrice he could not have been more horrified than he seemed to be. What was it ? In the last corner that he had visited, under some shavings, he had come across a little canvas bag, and in this little bag there were a few crumbs of leavened bread ; one of the workmen had left it on some former occasion. It was enough ; it defiled the whole place.

With the utmost possible gravity and solemnity, and with a

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most anxious expression of countenance as though it were a most critical and important business, the man took hold of two pieces of wood, and using them as a pair of tongs he raised up the bag, and holding it off at arm's length, marched out of the shop and dropped the leavened crumbs, bag and all, into the centre of a fire that he had burning outside ready for such a contingency, and so he purged out the old leaven.

Here then is our lesson. Whatever remnants of evil, either in propensity or desire, that we discover within us, there is a power that can purge it out. There is a Holy Spirit of burning that can and will consume the dross if only we are willing to be cleansed. And remember what the standard is, as indicated to us in Holy Scripture—"Every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." This is to be the standard of our purity, and we can be satisfied with nothing short of it. It is not to be expected that we shall attain to this level of life all at once. The Lord may go on making fresh revelations to us of latent impurity from time to time, but as the light discovers secret things of darkness within, purge them out by faith in the Purifier; purge them out by invoking the mighty and cleansing energies of the Holy Ghost; purge them out by claiming the full benefit of that atonement by which we are redeemed from all iniquity, and purchased by the Lord, to be only His.

Once more ere we close let us look at the Paschal feast, and this time observe it is the feast of *wayfaring men*. They were to eat it in haste, with shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands. It was the Lord's Passover. If you want to enjoy the Passover you must gird your loins, and take your staff in your hand, and assume the attitude of a wayfaring man. And it must not be the mere assumption of an attitude. Endeavour to realize that you are a wayfaring man, and shape your life accordingly.

Some Christians—too many, indeed—are sorely troubled about their lack of happiness. They will say, "Oh dear, I should like to be a great deal more happy than I am! I sometimes fear I can't be right, because I am not so happy as I ought to be." I very often think that such people defeat their own desire, because they make happiness an end of itself. Supposing God desires us to be happy, let us be happy; supposing He wishes us to have ecstasy and joy, let us have it, and thank Him for it. But suppose He says, "Now, my child,

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you must be content to follow Me without my gifts. For a season walk in darkness, and walk by faith." Then ought we not to be equally ready to thank Him for His kindly discipline, and so go on bravely walking in darkness?

I believe, and am fully persuaded, that the true secret of happiness lies in complete acquiescence in the Divine Will. Suppose that He should say, "Instead of rapture be content with calm quiet and peace." Let us take the peace and thank Him for that blessed gift which is not of earth. But when we make happiness, even religious enjoyment, an end of itself, and insist upon enjoying it, we, as it were, try to turn earth into heaven. I do not say we shall not have happiness, but I do say that when we make happiness our aim, we are putting the wrong thing before us, and must not be surprised if it is denied to us.

Our proper end is to glorify God by doing and suffering and enjoying His perfect will here on earth, rejoicing in that will, whatever it may be. We are to feast on the way; but it is a feast of wayfaring men. It was not a sumptuous feast, this passover. The lamb was to be eaten with bitter herbs, and it was to be eaten and done with as on a journey. Even so our enjoyments here on earth, religious or otherwise, are comparatively short-lived; but there may be a deep, quiet, calm undercurrent of real joy, running through all our experiences, while we wait for the fulness of joy, till we find it at His right hand for evermore.

Many, too, lose their paschal joy because they make themselves too much at home in this sin-blighted world of ours. They surround themselves with comforts and luxuries. Their professions affirm that they are pilgrims and strangers; their manner of life suggests that they are citizens of this country, and well-established citizens too. They speak of having their treasures in heaven; but it would appear that they also have no small share here on earth. They talk of seeking the things that are above; but it would be difficult to believe that they do not set their affections on the things that are on the earth. And so they fail to keep the feast; for such Christians are not generally happy, neither are their lives really holy. Neither the joy, nor the satisfaction, nor the sanctity of the paschal feast seems to fall to their lot. Is it not with them as with the lustful Israelites? God gives them their hearts' desire, but He sends leanness withal into their souls. And well is it in the case of



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such if they do not find a burying-place in Kibroth-Hattaavah, instead of a portion in Canaan. Oh, if we would keep the feast, let us remember that the table is spread now in the wilderness, and in the very presence of our enemies ; and only those who have their loins girded, and their staff in their hand, can either appreciate or enjoy it. But to such it is a pledge of the banquet which awaits the faithful followers of Christ—the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then we shall truly rest, and that, with a blessed consciousness of security denied us here. But do let us remember that the one feast leads up to the other, and that those who have not kept the life-long feast here on earth would not be able to value and enjoy, even if they were allowed to participate in it, the banquet which Love has provided yonder.

Such is the feast that we have the privilege of keeping—the feast of security, the feast of deliverance, the feast of separation, the feast of purification, the feast of wayfaring men. Now let us keep it ! If all this wealth of blessedness may be ours, let us make up our minds that it shall be. Why should we starve when the board is spread ? Why should our lives be sombre and gloomy when the voice of Love bids us feast ? "Eat, O friends ; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." Thus may our festal days pass happily away, and pass without vain and sorrowful regrets ; for the Master of our feast ever keeps the best till the last, and we need not grudge the flight of time if our feast, begun on earth, is to be continued throughout eternity.

By-and-by the King will come in to see the guests, and then we shall know the full festal joy—that restful and complete happiness which cannot be ours as yet. We shall have laid our staff aside then, and no longer eat our feast in haste ; for the Lord shall no longer be passing over us, but dwelling amongst us, and we shall see His face, and His name shall be in our foreheads, and we shall know what now we sing about—

"His ineffable name our foreheads proclaim,  
His glories our bodies display ;  
A day without night we feast in His sight,  
And eternity seems like a day !"

Let us keep the feast ! But are some of you saying, "I cannot keep the feast. If it be such a feast as you have described, I cannot keep it. I cannot keep the feast of safety,

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for I am not safe; nor the feast of deliverance, for I am not free; nor the feast of separation, for I belong to the world; nor the feast of purification, for my nature is permeated by the old leaven, and I cannot bring myself to purge it out; nor the feast of wayfaring men, for I am a citizen of this country"? Ah, my brother, thou sayest well, this feast is not for thee! So long as thou art content with thine Egyptian bondage, and art singing in thine heart, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians," thou mayest enjoy the flesh-pots of that land of bondage, but in the feast of the free thou canst not participate. And as those carnal and earthly gratifications cannot satisfy thee, thou art already in the condition of the prodigal in the famine land; thou art beginning to be in want. It is a feast of Tantalus that is spread before thee. Ever and anon the groaning board, laden with richest dainties, seems spread before thine eyes; and ever and anon the phantom banquet melts away, and leaves thee only the hunger of the soul. It is "as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite."

Why wilt thou deny thyself the feast of love, and elect to perish of want? For thee, my dear brother, for thee also Christ our passover hath been sacrificed. Thou too mayest sprinkle the paschal blood upon the lintel and the door-post; and then *thou* too mayest keep the feast, and join the blessed company of the redeemed as they set out on their way to Canaan; and thou too mayest know the blessedness of them that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Come and dip the hyssop of thy faith in the blood that streams from our Paschal Victim, and sprinkle it to-night in the presence of God; so shalt thou too be free to share the feast of the redeemed, safe under the blood-stained lintel.

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“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”—*Eph.* vi. 10, 11.

SO we come to our *finally*. Everything here must have an end, and our short period of mission services has very rapidly passed away. One after another its opportunities have presented themselves to us, one after another they have passed by, and here we are to-night at our *finally*.

A wonderful epistle is this to the Ephesians. Throughout its course St. Paul deals with some of the most profound mysteries of the Christian faith, expatiating upon these in their relation to Christian experience and conduct; and now at the end of his letter, ere he takes his leave of those whom he was addressing, he makes a last appeal to them to turn to practical account the lessons that they have been taught, and equipped with that knowledge which is power, to quit themselves like men on the battle-field of life.

And this final exhortation of the Apostles is indeed worthy of all that has gone before it. I suppose that last words are generally the words best remembered. We treasure the words of the dying; there are utterances that have fallen from the lips of our friends, while we have stood upon the border-land of the other world, wistfully gazing, as it were, after their receding forms, that we shall never, never forget so long as memory itself shall last. And last utterances from the lips of those who are to be separated from us otherwise by force of circumstances are often more deeply impressed on our mind than any other words they may have ever spoken. And here the closing words of an Apostle, very weighty and powerful in themselves, seem all the more impressive from their position at the close of this memorable epistle. And perhaps it may be so with what I say to-night. My words may perhaps sink all the deeper into your heart just because they are the last that you

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will hear in this mission, perhaps the last that some of you will ever hear from my lips.

*Finally!* I think we must all feel this is a grand close, and worthy of the remarkable epistle that it concludes, and it suggests thoughts that are indeed worthy of our circumstances to-night. St. Paul begins by bidding us "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." It is our duty to be strong; it is our privilege to be strong; it is our joy to be strong; it is our glory to be strong. Many a young Christian, when he looks forward to that which lies before him, the untried path of duty and privilege, is conscious of an inward shrinking and misgiving under a sense of weakness. Does it not seem as though you were starting forth on a chimerical enterprise? Does not the demand upon our powers seem great, and our resources to meet it inadequate? How often in the early days of our Christian life, like the prophet's servant, are we ready to wring our hands and exclaim, "Alas! my master, what shall we do?"

Oh that God may use my words to-night to impress on the minds of all who have trusted themselves to Jesus, that more are they that are for us than all that can be against us, and that the feeblest child of God, with an omnipotent Jehovah on his side, is more than a match for all the malignant skill, or all the spiritual power of the hosts of darkness! "Finally, brethren, be strong." It is not for you to compute the probabilities of your fall from considerations connected with your own natural infirmity. You have not to argue within yourselves, "I have failed before, I shall fail again." Oh, how many bring failure to themselves by entering upon their career in that spirit of unbelief! How slow we are to realize that our natural infirmity and peculiarities of temperament have nothing to do with the matter, except to make us feel all the more our utter and absolute dependence on the divine! Whatever circumstances may arise, my dear brethren, your strength is out of self and in God, so long as God dwells in you and you dwell in Him. It is your privilege not to tremble at the fact of your weakness, but to rejoice in the consciousness of your power.

Don't misunderstand me. I do not for a moment mean to say that we are not to recognize our own weakness; but it is one thing to recognize our own weakness and another thing to tremble at the thought of it. If the trembling is simply the fear and trembling which the Apostle elsewhere speaks of,

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springing from the sense of your own insufficiency—a fear and trembling that drives you nearer to God—the trembling of a little child, that makes it cling all the more tightly to its mother’s hand—ah ! then I would not say one word against it ; but if it be the trembling of apprehension and unbelief—if it be such a fear as David expressed when he said, “I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul”—then let me remind you that fear of this kind is and must be a source of weakness, and to indulge in it is to commit a sin. The man who goes forth to the battle-field with a heart palpitating with terror, expecting disaster and overthrow, must not be surprised at defeat. According to his unbelief, so will it be done unto him. The man that has the courage of his faith, that goes forth in the same Spirit as David did against Goliath—“Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield : but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied”—that is the man who, like David, will do exploits.

And here let me point out to you what many Christians need to be reminded of, that our career is one of conflict and fighting with foes that are ever seeking to regain their empire within. Remember they have been ejected from their position of authority within you, if you are a true child of God. The spirit of evil that once reigned in your nature has now been dethroned, and a new and mightier Spirit has taken its place ; but do bear in mind that it will still be the object of our great enemy to seek to obtain re-admittance into that consecrated nature of yours, and when he gets a foothold, ah ! then it is that all will begin to go wrong. As long as he is kept outside, and can only make attempts to regain a position in your heart, so long you are in a position to ensure victory ; but so soon as you allow him a footing in your nature, you are at once placed in a condition of peril, and the probable sequel will be disaster and defeat. But there are and always will be foes without, and against these you have to do battle in the power of God.

And let me say to young Christians, Don’t be surprised at conflict. Instead of its being a bad sign when Satan surrounds you with temptations, on the contrary, this is in itself an indication that the new life has begun. You never were much distressed at temptation in the days when your heart was not given to God ; nay, even when you had yielded to temptation, and had fallen into sin, it cost you no great pain. Surely no



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small change must have come over you now, when even *the attacks* of Satan cause you so much distress! But don't be surprised or cast down. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been tried he shall receive a crown of life." By all means expect conflict, and be ready armed to meet it, and don't shrink from it; but do not, on the other hand, play the foolhardy, and wilfully expose yourselves to Satan's attacks. Remember God pledges Himself to secure the safety of those who are His loyal servants by the very fact of providing them with His own armour, but you can only wear His armour when you are on His errands; and he who invites temptation goes out of the lines of the divine will, and so must leave his armour behind him.

But bear in mind also that you are called not only to conquest, but to victory. All the promises are made to Him that overcometh. Of course, we can never overcome unless there be conflict; but remember conflict can only mean defeat unless we are properly equipped. So we are brought back to the words of our text, "Be strong in the Lord;" but that ye may be strong, "put on the whole armour of God." Now before we proceed to consider this wondrous panoply which a Father's love has provided for our security, let us spend a moment or two in considering these forces which are arrayed against us.

Our conflict is described as being against the principalities and powers of spiritual wickedness, and particularly against the rulers of the darkness of this world. Observe then, dear friends, that this world has rulers of its darkness. The whole world lies in darkness; those who are out of Christ are in darkness; and this dark world has rulers of its own, and they have a court, and authority, and laws, and regulations, and influence of their own, which are exhibited in the lives and conduct of those who do not belong to the kingdom of God.

Now observe that your conflict has to be carried on, not only directly against the intelligences of evil, who seek your overthrow, but also indirectly against those influences of the world, through which the forces of evil are at work. I cannot sufficiently impress upon your minds this thought. Remember, young Christians, that the world is your ruthless and your implacable enemy. The world is in some sense a more dangerous enemy than the devil himself when he attacks us directly, just because it is much less alarming. You will understand what I mean.

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When Satan approaches one of you, and suggests some terrible sin, you at once start back with horror at the thought, and say with Joseph of old, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" And he knows that; so very probably he may not attempt to approach you in that way, but he will attack you through the world, when your alarm will not be similarly awakened.

The world presents a much less terrible aspect. It approaches you with blandishments, seeking to woo you back to its fellowship. The voices of the rulers of this world will sound through its children as they urge you not to be too rigorous and strait-laced. It is a very good thing to have a little religion, if you don't carry things too far. You must not be fanatical, you know. It won't do to let religion run away with you. Of course all decent people are more or less religious; it is only a question of degree. Some are a little more so than others; but it is quite possible to go too far, and to make yourself peculiar, and even absurd. So it is the world seeks to weaken you with her plausible sophistries, and thus render you an easy prey to Satan when he assaults you with some direct attack. And thus the rulers of the darkness of this world use the very darkness with which they blind the eyes of those who believe not to perplex and bewilder those who believe, and so rob them of their proper power. Ah! how many Christians fall wounded on life's battle-field just because they have been robbed of their armour by the insidious friendship of the world! The false friend has proved more perilous than the armed foe, and the victory has been lost because we did not till too late recognize our danger.

Believing then that the world is both a false and a most treacherous foe, how are we to guard against it? It seems to me that the true answer is, By putting on the armour of light. The rulers of darkness are to be defeated by the scattering of the darkness, and this is to be effected by the manifestation of light. For light is aggressive; wherever it exists it wars upon darkness. They who live to rob the rulers of the darkness of this world of their sway over human hearts by infusing the true light into those hearts are safest from the treacherous influence of the world. So I would say, So far as the rulers of the darkness of this world threaten you through the world, your wisdom lies in attacking them instead of waiting for them to attack you. Carry the war into the enemy's country, and you will find that

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the world won't be able to do you any harm while you are living to do it good.

But remember you are on the enemy's ground when you are in the world, and we go into our enemy's country to fight, not to enjoy ourselves. We are safe there or anywhere else so long as we are doing the King's work, but we begin to be in danger so soon as we enter upon relations of friendship with them.

When, on the other hand, you are dealing with these rulers of the darkness of this world *directly*, and not through those whom they rule, it becomes necessary for you to stand on the defensive, meeting the attack, and overcoming it by the skilful use of the divine armour. It is to this warfare that our text more particularly refers; but whatever be the character of the warfare, whether aggressive or defensive, whether waged against the rulers of darkness directly or against their subjects and dupes, nothing is to be done without putting on the whole armour of God. With it, and only with it, are we to overcome the world; with it we are to conquer Satan and his hosts, and having done all to stand.

Bear in mind then that our conflict is twofold. We have to wage war directly with the powers of darkness, and indirectly with their influences operating in the world around us, and exhibiting itself in the lives of the children of this world. And remember that both these hostile forces have to be contended against and overcome, and that if we fail with either we shall fail with both. I want to press this upon you. Mark my word: I do not believe that we shall succeed in fighting God's battle in our hearts and in our inner experience unless we also are ready to fight God's battle in the world outside. Nor do I believe we shall prevail in fighting God's battle in the world unless we are also at the same time overcoming the wicked one in the region of our own personal experience. The two forms of conflict are to be maintained simultaneously, and a double victory is to be won.

If we deliberately purpose in our hearts to keep our religion indeed, but to keep it to ourselves—if we don't intend to obtrude it upon the attention of others, or seek to win others to the enjoyment of a similar benefit, we shall soon find that we shall have little or no religion to keep. Where there is no aggressive action against the world, the aggressive influences of the world, which are very subtle but very potent,

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will very soon rob us of the little religion that we have. If, on the other hand, we give place to the devil within, and let him master us in our secret conflicts with him, our testimony will very soon lose its power, and our voice in the world will be as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal. Our victory needs to be complete all round if it is to be victory at all.

But now let us pass on to consider the provision here made for our victory. In order to be successful in this great conflict, the Apostle warns us to "put on the whole armour of God." Let us contemplate this wondrous panoply that we are to wear. Just let me remind you in passing of the points we have already touched on. First, we are to be strong; but "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." Second, we are to expect conflict, and to be ready for it. Third, we have considered the nature of our foe; we are to fight against the powers of darkness without us in the world and in our inner life when they attack us, and endeavour to establish their footing within. And fourth, we have seen that in *both* those regions this war has to be carried on successfully; for to fail in either is to fail in both. And now, fifth, we proceed to observe that there is a special provision made for our success in that divine armour which God Himself has provided.

Let us consider what is meant by its being "the whole armour of God." Surely we gather from this expression, first, that it can only be supplied by God; we cannot forge for ourselves this suit of mail. It was never produced by any terrestrial Vulcan. No skill of ethical philosopher or religious reformer can bring it within our reach. This leads us to the second thought, that it is the armour of God, because we can only wear it when we are in the full enjoyment of our proper relations with God. It is only as we are constantly drawing from Him that we can be equipped for the war, and thus we are led on to the third point—that this armour is the armour of God, because the possession of it is the direct product of the presence of God within. Where the Spirit of God inhabits our nature, His presence insures our possession of this armour of proof. Or perhaps, in the fourth place, we may call it the armour of God because Jesus Christ, the God-man, was clothed in it, and in it defeated the foe. At any rate, we may learn what this armour is, and how best to use it, by studying the use that Christ made of it. We may learn how to use our

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arms properly by watching the motions and methods of a skilful and experienced soldier, and so, it seems to me, we may form some idea of how to use the armour of God by observing how it was employed by Him who is our great Exemplar in this as well as in every other respect.

Now observe the direction given us here, "Take unto you ;" as though he would say, The thing belongs to you, this wondrous panoply is yours already, but you have to claim it as your rightful possession, to grasp it with a believing hand, and to equip yourselves with it, as those who believe that God means it for us. Now many an unbelieving prayer is offered for treasures which all the while are really ours, if we would but have the courage, and faith, and the decision of will to take them.

Well then the first step towards arming ourselves is taken when we have our loins girt about with truth. Now mark carefully two senses of that word truth. First, it signifies the inward condition or habit of soul ; and second, the apprehension of external verities, the "agreement of thought with thing."

This inward condition is usually called subjective truth, or, as we frequently name it, truthfulness, or honesty, and sincerity of heart—the single eye, the pure desire, the straightforwardness of purpose. Now it is obvious that as we gird our loins, so as to be the stronger for our work, even so, unless we are perfectly sincere and honest in our intention to make no kind of terms with recognized evil, we never can be in a position to enter upon the conflict or to bring it to a successful issue. It is easy to see how necessarily weak a divided heart must be. He who loves the wages of unrighteousness, like Balaam the son of Bosor, while all the time he seeks to maintain his relations with God, must ever fail on the battle-field of life, or, if indeed he fights at all, like Balaam, he will fight on the wrong side. St. Barnabas exhorted his disciples to cleave to the Lord with *full purpose of heart*, and such is the exhortation that I would address to you now.

Observe these two senses of the word truth are much more closely connected with each other than we might think. Our Lord teaches us that if any man *WISHES* to do God's will—is only desirous, that is to say, to be inwardly true to the one great purpose of life—he shall know of the doctrine. When we cultivate a habit of honesty of heart, this will bring along with it honesty of mind, and to such the Lord can reveal His



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truth. Now as falsehood is the strength of the kingdom of Satan, so truth is the strength of the kingdom of God; and those who know the truth will find that their loins are girded with that which is a real source of power. The father of lies will all along attack you with his lies, but the light of truth will rob these of their influence. He who walks in the truth sees through Satan's sophistries and learns to despise his snares, and finds that, in spiritual as well as in natural things, knowledge is power.

But, observe, that your loins may be girt about with truth, you must study the truth, and become acquainted with it. Hence, dear young Christians, the necessity of studying your Bibles, and becoming more and more acquainted with God's will as revealed there. Let me remind you of our blessed Lord's own words, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." It is only by continuing in His word that we can become His disciples indeed, and feel the liberating power of the truth.

But I must hasten on. "Put on the breastplate of righteousness." We are considered righteous when first we come to Christ because of the gift of righteousness which comes from God, and is to be received by faith; and it is most important that we should not allow anything to rob us of that sense of justification which flows from redemption. But while this is the foundation of all righteousness in our hearts and lives, I do not believe that it is of righteousness in this limited sense that St. Paul is speaking here. Observe he is here dealing, not with our standing, but with our experience, and he seems to have before his mind that practical righteousness which indeed is only possible to the justified, but which may reasonably be expected to flow from justification. He himself tells us that the righteous claim of the law is to be fulfilled in us "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." St. Paul tells us of himself in this respect, that herein did he exercise himself to have always a conscience void of offence before God and man.

Now perplexing but very deeply interesting questions as to what amount of perfection, negative or otherwise, may be expected in this life are very frequently asked at present, and we are often asked, Is it possible to live without sin? The best answer to such enquiries, it seems to me, is a very practical

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one. It is possible for those who walk by faith in the Son of God, so long as they do so walk, to retain a conscience void of offence before God and man. That is our calling. It is possible for you, by the grace of God, to be kept from doing anything that you know to be opposed to the mind and will of God, and when that is your condition you are wearing the breastplate of righteousness.

Think for a moment how very necessary and indispensable a portion of your spiritual armour this is, and how incapable you are of fighting when this has been laid aside or forfeited. If you are betrayed into a sin, and that sin is still upon your conscience unforgiven, oh, how weak you are! You go forth to labour for God, but you cannot labour; your words are like sounding brass. You go forth to meet the enemy on the battle-field of your own inner experiences, and when you are exposed to temptation you cannot resist him, but fall again, because your breast is not clean. It is not covered with that breastplate of burnished steel on which the light of heaven's purity can be reflected. The sin of yesterday produces the sin of to-day. You are weak because you have fallen. There is a weight upon your conscience and a mis-giving in your heart, and you are not in a position to draw your sword and to do battle bravely and well.

But it may perhaps be asked, How shall we keep our breastplate bright, and ever wear it ready for action? Well, first be very careful and watchful in guarding against the beginnings of sin, and trust to the power of God in Christ to keep you from sinning. And next, if unhappily you should ever be betrayed into anything you feel to be a sin, don't keep it upon your conscience. Go straight to the mercy-seat and confess it, and humble yourself before God. Ask God to give you deep and penitential sorrow because you have grieved that Christ who loves you so well, and to whom you are so deeply indebted; but, even while you confess, claim by faith His forgiving mercy. "These things," says St. John, "write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the satisfaction for our sins." Don't carry about with you a load of unforgiven sins. There is nothing thrusts us off to a distance from God more surely than an accumulated mass of unforgiven sin.

Next, we are to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Thus it was that the feet of Christ Him-

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self were clad. Wherever Christ went mercy winged His feet. He went about doing good ; He was guided by love. I have already spoken of the danger of going into the world except on one errand. Look at the illustration here. It was frequent in ancient warfare to prepare the ground against an invading army by scattering over it sharp and cutting materials, such as broken glass or potsherds, that would soon disable an ill-shod enemy.

And even so when you go into the world. Remember you are only safe when you wear your gospel greaves. He who goes into the world on his Master's service shod with the preparedness or readiness of gospel benevolence will remain uninjured by all the snares that the world spreads for him ; but he who goes into the world on furlough won't take his armour with him—soldiers never do—and so what wonder if his feet are torn and lacerated because they are not properly shod.

The word here translated preparation might perhaps be better rendered "readiness." The Apostle tells us elsewhere that we are to be ever "ready to give an answer of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear," and the thought suggested here seems to be a very helpful and a very practical one. We cannot always speak, but we may always be ready to speak ; and if our feet are shod with readiness, then we shall be able to rush in wherever a door is opened. We know how unfit we feel for any active exertion when we are unshod. If anything has to be done of considerable moment our first business is to put on our shoes, and if we are lazy and indolent in bestirring ourselves to do this the opportunity of doing our work may have passed away.

Even so how many a spiritual opportunity do we miss because we are not shod with "readiness !" We are feeling as if we were "off duty." Perhaps too we are somewhat out of communion, or perhaps we are conferring with flesh and blood, and, like Jonah of old, considering whether or not the task is likely to be a pleasing one, and so the privilege is lost, and we fail to prove ourselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ, or to exert our proper influence upon a perishing world.

Oh, Christian soldier, hold thyself in readiness, even as Philip did in the wilderness (surely, if anywhere, he might have taken his greaves off there), and then, like his, our ear shall hear the orders that fall from the Master's lips, and, like Philip, we shall be able to run ! Remember, no man ever runs to do

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God's work unless he is shod with the readiness of the Gospel of Peace.

Now we come to perhaps the most important point of all: "Above all take the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one." Here, first, is encouragement for us all. The fiery darts are sure to come; but, if we only use that shield, however fiery the darts of the wicked one may be, we *shall be able* to quench them. Many are these fiery darts, and well does Satan know how to use them.

With the young Christian, fresh to the new life, they are frequently venomous suggestions that Satan throws out with respect to God. Don't think that you are a child of God, nor venture to dream that all is right between you and Him. You have not the joy and the rapture that belongs to God's children; nay, you have not even a sufficiently calm and deep and unbroken peace. These are fiery darts, and many a young Christian do they grievously wound. Long years ago I was attacked by the enemy after that fashion. When I was a mere boy, and not long after I had given myself to Christ, the enemy came in like a flood upon me. "You are not converted," said the tempter, "don't you think it. You would feel very different to what you do if you were." Well, at first I was very much cast down, and began to wonder whether I could be; but after a time I took up the shield, and faced him with it; that perhaps may seem a big shield for a child to lift, but it adapts itself to all ages, and thus armed even a child is a match for the devil. Wearied out with uncertainties, at last I appealed to facts. I asked myself, as a matter of distinct and definite moral consciousness, "Now look here, Have I trusted my soul into the hands of Jesus Christ, or have I not?" My own personal consciousness answered, "Yes, I know that I have. If ever I have performed any inward act I know I have done this—I have rested my soul on Christ and left myself in His hands. Very well then, if I have put myself in Jesus' hands there I am; and now, Satan, if you want me you must go to Jesus Christ for me; if He won't give me over to you, then you can't have me." That was enough; he was not able to get his darts through that shield. His darts may be fiery, but there is something in that shield that is sure to quench them. Alas! he has obtained many an advantage over me since then, because I have been too careless in using my armour; but

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from that day to this he has never been able to shake my confidence in a God-forgiving love. If Christ be the Christ of the New Testament I am quite sure that I can't be wrong in trusting myself absolutely to Him, and so there I rest.

But these are not the only fiery darts that he will shoot at you ; he will suggest evil thoughts, and endeavour to awaken unholy desires, or to stir rancorous feelings or unlovely tempers. Remember that we are to resist him "steadfast in the faith," believing without doubt in God's ability to raise us above temptation, and to keep us from its power. Or perhaps he will assail you through others with cruel persecutions and gibes and jeers, which none of us find it very easy to bear, and then when all seems against you he will whisper blasphemies in your ear, and tell you that God doesn't love you or He would never suffer you to be so severely tried, and allow you to be exposed to such hostile influences. Yes, dear child of God, you too may perhaps, as David did, hear the enemy say—"God hath forsaken him : persecute and take him ; for there is none to deliver him." But now is the time for the shield of faith—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him ;" or, better still—"I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened and corrected me ; but He hath not given me over unto death." "In Him I trust that He will yet deliver me."

Remember your strength lies on changeless confidence in a changeless God. Let appearances say what they will, God *is* love, and we will believe it, come what may. We walk by faith, and not by sight. Up with the shield, and the fiery darts may smite hissing hot upon it, but your defence is sure ; you *shall* be able to quench them.

And take the helmet of salvation. Obviously the head is a most important part ; for a wound here may easily prove fatal, and even a severe blow may rob you of all power elsewhere, and leave you stunned and senseless on the battle-field. Hence the importance of the helmet to the warrior, and of our helmet to us. Let us take care that we wear it, otherwise we must not be surprised if Satan smites us on our head. And indeed I am afraid there are not a few Christians who seem to have fared thus on the battle-field of life. They think that they can dispense with this God-provided helmet ; indeed, some seem to believe that it is very presumptuous to wear it. They seem to think that doubts and fears as to their salvation are more



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appropriate to the experience of blood-bought Christians than joyous confidence and a happy sense of security, and so they go bareheaded into the battle-field ; and what wonder if Satan sees his advantage and smites them down, and robs them of all ability to do God's work properly, or to fight His battles.

How many stunned Christians do we meet with—Christians who seem to have lost all capacity for usefulness, just because they have been struck on the head by the enemy ! They have invited doubt, and declined the enjoyment of their proper confidence, and now doubt has paralyzed all their energies, and there they lie stricken and helpless, just because they would not wear the helmet that divine love had provided for them in those words which belong to all true believers : “By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Oh, dear young Christians, put on this helmet of salvation, and wear it before all, with all true humility, but with a holy boldness ; so shall you be proof against those attacks which, if successful, must rob your whole spiritual nature of its power and capacity, and leave you a mere incumbrance on the battle-field, requiring the assistance of other Christians to apply restoratives, instead of being able to contribute to the general victory.

So far we have been considering our weapons of defence ; but as we are to act on the aggressive against the rulers of the darkness of this world, that is not enough. So the Apostle goes on to say, “And take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” It has often been pointed out that it was by this weapon that our blessed Lord overcame Satan, referring again and again to this written Word ; and we may observe that He used this sword, not only to parry and foil Satan's attacks, but also to inflict a mighty home-thrust on his foe, for as such I always regard the answer to the third temptation. Self-worship, self-idolatry, had been apparently the first great sin of the devil, and against this Christ launched out when He answered the third and most attractive of all the temptations, as it would have appeared to us, with the quotation, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” This was just what he had failed to do, and when he is thus reminded of his first great sin, he turns his back and flies : the rebuke was too well merited for him to be able to endure it.

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But it was not only in hand-to-hand conflicts with Satan that our Lord used this weapon; it was ever where a warrior's sword should be—at his side, ready to hand. So He was prepared to overthrow alike Pharisee and Sadducee, and indeed to silence every hostile tongue by His skilful use of the same weapon; and even when He hung upon the cross, in that last and most terrible conflict, the word of God was still on His lips, and with this weapon He triumphed over Satan in His last fierce onset, dying with a text upon His lips.

Dear young Christians, learn to use this weapon, and have confidence in it. Meet your doubts and difficulties with the word of God. Resist the attack of Satan, the temptations and worldly influences with which you may be assailed, with the word of God; carry on your friendly warfare against the world by the word of God, and seek to become acquainted with it that you may use it, and so drink of the very spirit of it that it may be a power in your life and on your lips.

But those of you who have read *Pilgrim's Progress* will remember how, when Christian was sorely pressed, there came a time when even his good sword seemed of little service to him, and then in his emergency he had recourse to another weapon unknown to the armouries of earth, and that weapon was *all prayer*. The Apostle knew nothing about modern artillery, or perhaps he might have found a sufficient figure there; but we may say that what artillery is to modern warfare, that all prayer is to our spiritual conflict; for as the use of artillery puts some of the mightiest forces of nature at the disposal of the soldier, so all prayer puts us in possession of the very forces of Omnipotence. The hand that holds the thunderbolts, and could crush a world, is lifted up on behalf of the praying soul.

Dear Christian friends, believe in the power of prayer, or rather in the power of the God who hears and answers prayer. And remember the two words here used — *always* with *all* prayer. If one sort of prayer does not seem to suit your spiritual condition or your circumstances, and you don't seem making much way with it, try another; if your prayers for yourself don't seem to be very spiritual or powerful, perhaps it is a sign that you should pray for others; if you don't feel drawn to pray for individuals, pray for your church or your country; if you don't feel liberty in any of these respects, begin and pray for the Lord's coming; if you don't find it easy

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to pray for anything, lift up your heart in praise. Thus pray with all manner of prayer. If your mind wanders in long prayers, then pray short, but more frequently; if you cannot make consecutive and well-arranged prayers, you may yet lay hold of God with simple ejaculations.

And this brings us to our last point—“*pray always.*” By all means have your fixed times for prayer, but don't confine prayer to these; your lives are to be prayers. Take the presence of God with you wherever you go, speak to Him of everything, consult Him about everything, recognize Him everywhere, and thus shall your whole life be a sanctity, and you shall find good in everything. Your very needs and trials shall be blessings, your very temptations shall be benefits, because all alike will drive you nearer to Him whom having not seen you love, and love the more because He is your constant companion and your most intimate friend.

Farewell! “Watch ye,” Christian soldiers, stand fast in faith, quit you like men, and be strong, and one day peradventure you too will be able to say, with the brave soldier St. Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at His appearing.” “To him that overcometh and keepeth my works, to him will I give power over the nations, and He shall rule them with a rod of iron, and as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers.” “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.”



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